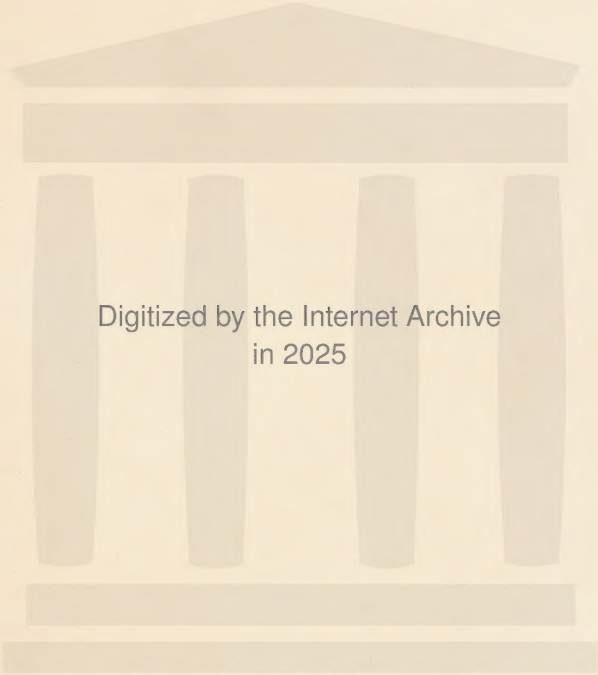
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Fisher

THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES B. BAYNARD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SAMUEL TINSLEY,

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THE RECTOR OF OXBURY.

CHAPTER I.

L. F. H.

SHELTERED from the rays of the June sun, and lazily stretched on the grass under an apple-tree in Mr. Gray's orchard, Amos Flint was listening with no pleasurable feelings to certain objurgatory sounds in the stable hard by, where the old farmer, assisted by one of his lads, was harnessing the mare to the four-wheeled chaise. Mr. Gray was about to drive his pretty daughter to the railway station at Oxbury, whence she was to proceed to London on a visit to a maiden aunt. Mary herself, attired for

her journey, and looking exceedingly bright and happy, was sitting by her lover, and secretly amused by the vexed expression that appeared upon his face.

"You don't seem at all sorry to leave us, Polly," remarked Amos gloomily.

She answered with a merry laugh, "Aunt has sent for me, you know, and I must go; it is no use being sorry."

The young man kicked at a tuft of green moss at his feet and was sullenly silent. Here the farmer's voice was heard calling for his daughter, and Mary tripped lightly to the chaise. Amos picked himself up and followed her with measured strides.

"Jump up behind, Amos," said Mr. Gray when he and his daughter were seated; and the lover having done so they drove away. As the chaise turned a corner in the lane just outside the village of Wickle they met the Rector of Oxbury, who was on horseback. The farmer touched his hat to him as he passed. When he was out of earshot, Mr. Gray said to Amos:

"The parson looks rather down in the mouth this morning."

"Yes," returned the young man, "since Mr. Hartleby died he has seemed very much depressed."

"Lonely by himself in that big rectory, I dare say," said the farmer.

"Why doesn't he marry?"

"I suppose he will, after a bit," returned Mr. Gray. "He can't keep on like this. It will be one of the squire's lasses, the folks say."

No more was said about Mr. Maxforth, but a casual word, dropped soon afterwards by Amos respecting the dissenting minister, led to a discussion of the affairs of Grange Street. The chief incidents of the past year—Mr. Holland's settlement, the opposition of Mr. Staggers, the minister's marriage, the requisition and his reception of it—all these, and many other facts relating to the chapel, were well known to the old farmer, who had not only heard Amos Flint's version, but also various accounts, more or less correct, from ac-

quaintances in Oxbury. Whenever he could gather news of the place, Mr. Gray was eager to learn it, as he felt great interest in Mr. Holland's struggles. But just at this time there were special reasons why the farmer wished for information. As the reader is aware, it had been confidently predicted in many quarters that the minister would leave Oxbury this midsummer. "Had he not promised to do so," it had been asked, "when he made that speech in Larberry's house?" Midsummer was now close at hand, and people were wondering whether their expectations would be realised. Special efforts also were being made by some to secure the realisation of those wishes. Then again, the time was drawing very near when the house-rents derivable from the chapel property would be due. Would the trustee hand them over to Mr. Holland, or would he not? Would the rumours that had been floating about be falsified, or would they prove to have been well founded? And then, lastly, what course would be

pursued by the church with reference to Mr. Snooley and the office he had been holding on "probation?" The three months were all but gone. Would he be elected as deacon for life; or would Mr. Garrel be chosen; or again, would it be decided to leave Mr. Gloss's place vacant altogether?

Mr. Gray was duly enlightened on each and all of these points by Amos Flint. He was informed that it was not at all probable Mr. Holland would leave at midsummer, and that Mr. Snooley's report had been so often contradicted that he (Amos) believed it was founded in a mistake. No doubt the minister's stay in Oxbury would be short, but still there was no prospect of its immediate termination. As to Mr. Staggers and the house-rents, Amos did not doubt that the minister would receive them, for Mr. Staggers was, he said, a man of honour. The question relating to the deaconate was a more difficult one, and required to be handled, Amos thought, with considerable caution. Still, it was

absurd to suppose that Mr. Garrel would supplant Mr. Snooley. Amos would take care to prevent any possibility of that kind. At the same time, he admitted that Mr. Snooley was not popular, and it was probable he would withdraw. In that case, things would be left as they were previously to the elections. Amos, however, meant to do his best to secure Mr. Snooley's re-appointment. When asked if he thought that Mr. Copperfox would second his endeavours, he replied, he believed he would not. Mr. Copperfox was a very dear friend of his, and he (Amos) had deeply sympathised with him when lying under that base accusation which had led to the inquiry in his cousin's house; and he (Amos) rejoiced that that accusation had been then and there disposed of, instead of being afterwards brought before the church. Nevertheless, Mr. Copperfox's views upon this question, and his own, did not coincide, as he had said before; and therefore the result of the next church meeting was doubtful.

Such were the topics discussed during the drive to the railway station. When the party arrived there, Amos Flint made himself useful in looking after Mary's luggage, finding time, nevertheless, to say a few tender things to her, which were on the whole well received; so that when at length he had witnessed Mary's departure in the train, he walked home again a tolerably happy man, and did not see the least reason to fear that his rival—the young farmer—would supplant him in Mary's affection.

It is hardly necessary to state that the question whether or not the trustee of the chapel property had a balance in hand was at this time a very important one to Mr. Holland. In fact, the minister was experiencing considerable anxiety upon this very subject. His stipend, as we know, was miserably small, chiefly because the greater part of the income of the place was derived from house-rents, and these had not been forthcoming on account of the repairs. The defection of several well-to-do

seatholders had reduced the income still more. If the house-rents should be permanently withheld, Mr. Holland would certainly not be able to subsist at Oxbury. It is true that by dint of management and economy on his wife's part, and with the aid of various gifts from the Rector, Dame Crock, Larberry, and others, they had hitherto contrived to make both ends meet. It is also true that, so long as the minister believed it right that he should stand his ground, no privation would induce him to flinch from it. Still, he had all along been persuaded that if it was his duty to remain, these house-rents would assuredly be paid to him when they were due. And, though this pittance had sufficed so far, it by no means followed that it would suffice in the future. They had pinched themselves, but they had told each other, for their mutual encouragement, that it was but for one year. At midsummer, they said, their condition would certainly begin to improve. Midsummer had now arrived, and they began to tremble lest, after all, it

would not be as they had hoped. The deacons had made no sign; Mr. Flint, who, though a trustee, was himself, perhaps, without information upon the subject, had not breathed a word. On all these accounts, there was, just now, much anxiety at the chapel-house.

The fact, moreover, that the church-members would have to be convened very shortly to decide with reference to Snooley, by no means diminished Mr. Holland's uneasiness. His experience of church meetings at Grange Street had not been of such a pleasurable kind that he could anticipate this particular one with much satisfaction. The truth is that such occasions had, in the past, been used by Copperfox as grand opportunities in which to measure his strength with the minister. They had also been employed to take away the latter's prerogative, to introduce measures calculated to fetter him in the discharge of his duties, and to render the government of the society more democratic than ever. Remonstrance, rebuke, and entreaty had

all been in vain; the Red Republicans were determined to have their way. The indignation of Reuben Crock, as he witnessed the intermeddling of these persons—hardly any of whom attended worship at the chapel—was met by them with jaunty indifference or silent contempt; and the wrangling of such zealots as Mr. Snooley and Mr. Copperfox, who apparently loved these broils, and whose unruly and turbulent spirits it was impossible to curb, seemed likely to reduce the old disorder into positive chaos.

Such was the position of affairs when, one Friday night, Mr. Holland went into the vestry to attend the church meeting already mentioned. The aspect of the place was about the same as at previous meetings. Mr. Snooley was absent, it is true; but the minister held a letter in his hand which fully explained that circumstance. Mr. Snooley had come to the conclusion that he was not suited to the office to which he had been called; a conclusion which a great many of the Grange Street

people shared with him. He had, therefore, written a letter to the society, in which he stated that the pressure of his daily occupations did not allow him time to attend to the duties of the office, and he must therefore decline to continue in it any longer. He suggested also that the church should elect some other brother in his room. This letter had been sent to the minister's house with a view to his reading it to the members. As may be imagined, it afforded him no little relief. He did not, it is true, expect Garrel to be elected. The brewer's calling constituted an effectual bar to any such promotion ; nevertheless, there was now another opportunity, he thought, for the exercise of common-sense and sound judgment. Unfortunately, however, with such a motley crew as he had to deal with, it was impossible to forecast the issue of any meeting whatever.

The minister read the letter to the church, and then left the matter entirely in their hands.

"I beg to move," said Amos Flint, who

was determined to harass and distress the pastor, "that our brother Snooley be requested to hold office for another three months. We are quite satisfied with the manner in which he has discharged his duties; and though he declines to be re-elected, the church has power to set that letter aside, and I propose that we do so."

"And I beg to second that proposition," said Clatts, who was equally determined to be troublesome. "Brother Snooley is a good man: the best man for the post that we have amongst us, in fact, and I should like to see him chosen."

Before putting it to the meeting, Mr. Holland mildly stated his own views, but he knew beforehand that the avowal would only confirm his opponents in the course they had taken. And here it should be stated that the minister had never brought any pressure to bear upon Snooley, with the design of inducing him to write this letter. He had ever treated the man with kindness and courtesy, and was quite satisfied that he had never spoken one dis-

paraging word of him to any mortal whatever. Therefore he was the more convinced that Snooley's resignation, being quite voluntary and agreeable to the large minority who had voted against him, ought to be accepted. And besides, taking the history of the society into consideration, and remembering its present critical circumstances, the motion was objectionable, since, if it were carried, another election would have to take place at the end of three months, to the further unsettling of the people. It would, perhaps, be unjust to say the minister's opponents *wished* the community to remain unsettled. It is certain, however, that their aim had always been to keep various unimportant questions before it continually, and to postpone decision upon them as long as possible. In this instance their counsels did not prevail, as they were themselves divided in opinion.

The minister was in the act of putting Amos Flint's motion to the meeting, when Mr. Copperfox interposed.

"I beg to move," said he, with twinkling eyes, "an amendment. I propose that our dear brother Snooley's letter be received, and his resignation accepted, and that no other person be elected in his room. Our valued brother, Mr. Flint, ought to be the sole deacon;" and he looked round with much self-complacency as he resumed his seat.

Poor Mr. Holland was unfeignedly gratified when this bold amendment was duly seconded, and carried by a large majority.

The present chronicler may as well reveal the fact that the minister's views regarding his own sect were undergoing a change. When he came to Oxbury Philip had been a firm believer in the excellency of the dissenting system. Even now he was prepared to defend it against all comers. Nevertheless these business meetings at Grange Street had filled his mind with grave doubts. He was not himself conscious how much his admiration of dissent had abated; but it *had* abated con-

siderably. He knew there were several good men and women among his people; but he also knew that their voting powers in ecclesiastical matters, and their frequent exercise of them, were stumbling-blocks in their way, while to the majority those powers were decidedly mischievous. Take Mr. Flint, for example. This worthy man was now the "sole deacon," and his activity, method, and probity were unquestionable. The temporal affairs of the community were kept in fair order. He worked with so hearty a will, and accomplished so much, that it might almost have been thought he possessed a hundred hands. Mr. Holland, indeed, often playfully called him "Briareus" on this account. Yet the dissenting system had narrowed Mr. Flint's mind, and wrought harm to him in a thousand ways. But notwithstanding these doubts which the minister had begun to feel, he had no thought of entering the Church, or of ceasing to be a Nonconformist.

One morning at breakfast-time, just as

Mrs. Holland was exhibiting some tradesmen's bills to her husband, and the young people were wondering if they would ever have the means to discharge them, a knock came to the front door, and a minute afterwards Mr. Flint was shown into the sitting-room. After a formal greeting he took out a small purse from his pocket. They knew what was coming, and their hearts leaped for joy. Let it be stated that up to this time they had kept out of debt.

"The acting trustee sent for me to his house last night, sir," said Mr. Flint, as he counted out a few sovereigns upon the table.

"Of course I am very glad and thankful," responded the minister.

"Mr. Staggers handed me the balance of the house rents, sir," continued the deacon, with a grim smile, "and I have brought the money to you. Will you see if it is correct?"

"Quite correct, Mr. Flint, and I am very much obliged to you."

Kate's eyes were beaming with delight.

When the deacon had gone Philip poured the gold into his wife's lap.

"I am so thankful," she cried, and her face was radiant with happiness.

Another knock came to the door. It was the postman. A letter in a strange handwriting, for the Rev. Philip Holland. When he opened it, *there* were the half bank-notes and the mysterious communication signed "L. F. H."

They were mute with astonishment; intoxicated with joy.

"Who can it be?" asked Mrs. Holland in an ecstasy.

"Ah, that is the problem," said her husband.

The letter was read over and over, the bank-notes examined and re-examined. Numberless conjectures were hazarded as to their unknown friend, but they did not hit upon the right one that day.

"Some time or other it will be cleared up," said the minister, "meanwhile let us kneel down and thank God."

CHAPTER II.

MR. COPPERFOX HAS AN IDEA.

THE good fortune that had happened to the minister soon became noised abroad, and everybody in Oxbury began to talk about it. Mr. Maxforth was one of the first to hear respecting the strange letter and the bank-notes, but of course he kept his own counsel; and as he had remained away from the chapel-house for some months, and had never betrayed the interest he felt in Mr. Holland to any one except the testator, no one suspected the Rector of knowing more than his neighbours. Reuben Crock might have guessed pretty near the truth perhaps, but he was too simple-minded to make conjectures,

and, besides, was not much given to gossip.

The Grange Street people did not all rejoice with their pastor. Some of them feared he might be in danger of pride and worldly-mindedness, with so large an income as a hundred pounds a year in addition to his stipend. These worthy persons shook their heads and remarked that "mayhap it was more than was good for his soul's health." Nevertheless many of the church-members offered their congratulations to him, foremost among them being Dame Crock and her husband. This excellent couple, at any rate, did not see any reason to expect a diminution of Mr. Holland's piety and attention to spiritual concerns.

The minister certainly needed all this encouragement to enable him to meet the fresh difficulties that now presented themselves. The efforts he had been making to reconcile his opponents, and to introduce broader and more liberal views, had proved unavailing, and his friends had now come

to the conclusion that there could be no peace for the society at Grange Street until Mr. Copperfox, Amos Flint, and the rest who were like-minded, were in some way or other got rid of. Poor Mr. Holland himself was of this opinion too; for the disaffected, emboldened by their recent success in securing Mr. Snooley's election, were now constantly encroaching upon his rights and liberties. He told himself, therefore, that every vestige of authority and influence would most assuredly be taken from him should they continue to attend the business meetings, and enjoy the same license as heretofore. He was no longer desirous to conciliate them, but fervently wished they might be induced to join some other community. Those who had withdrawn to Peeble's Lane still claimed to belong to the mother-church, for their names were still upon the books; but he knew that they contemplated forming themselves into a regular society, with a complete organ-

isation, and a settled minister. There was a prospect, therefore, that they would speedily sunder themselves from Grange Street altogether. As for the rest, it was to be hoped they would follow the example of this troublesome clique, and get themselves "dismissed" with the usual formalities to the new church.

While the minister was cherishing these expectations, his opponents were, on their part, rejoicing in the discovery that a grand opportunity would soon be presented for making his burdens intolerable. The fact that Grange Street was sorely in need of money was just now beginning to press itself upon the attention of all who were dissatisfied with the present *régime*, and it occurred to Copperfox that this circumstance might, if judiciously handled, be turned into a far more formidable weapon than any that had yet been wielded against the minister. Though the latter had successfully resisted the attacks hitherto made against him, it seemed probable that

this one, coming after so many previous troubles, and at a time when he might be supposed to be completely wearied and almost worn out, would induce him to resign; and even if it did not accomplish that much-desired result, yet it would at least indicate that his opponents were irreconcilable. Accordingly, Copperfox, as a preliminary step, took counsel upon the subject with his friends, and, more particularly, he sought the advice and assistance of the deacon.

It may be as well to state that Mr. Flint did not now stand so high in the estimation of either party as he had done some weeks previously. The minister's supporters, observing that the deacon sedulously avoided identifying himself with them, were loud in their complaints. So long as he had defended the tactics of the opposition, they had respected and even feared him; but now he professed to condemn those tactics; nevertheless, they knew he was not with them in his heart. This conviction led them to speak of him in severe terms, some

saying that he was "a trimmer," and others calling him "a snake in the grass." On one point they were all agreed, namely, that it would not be possible for him to remain in his position of neutrality much longer. Supposing—as some of them did suppose—that he was simply waiting to see which side would prove victorious in this protracted struggle before he declared himself, they were quite convinced that in a very few days *that* question would be decided, once for all; the present crisis being undoubtedly more important than any that had gone before it; and should Mr. Holland come safely through this encounter, there was every probability that his opponents would withdraw in a body to Peeble's Lane, leaving him in possession of the field.

On the other hand, Mr. Flint was in bad odour with the more resolute and pronounced of the malcontents, because he still attended the services at Grange Street, and also because he openly deprecated their violent and high-handed proceedings.

Nevertheless, they did not despair of securing his earnest co-operation in the measures they were about to adopt.

"I wish, Mr. Flint," said Copperfox, drawing his chair nearer to the deacon, and speaking in a soft, insinuating tone, "I very much wish that your labours for the good of our Zion met with the success they deserve. I grieve to see so much talent and energy thrown away."

"Nay," replied Mr. Flint reprovingly; "our efforts in such a cause, however unworthy, can never be in vain."

"True," said Copperfox; "but my meaning was this. If we had another minister, your unimpeachable rectitude and great abilities would be sure to make our church flourish; as it is, all your method, accuracy, and economy in the management of our funds do not prevent us from getting deeper in debt every month."

"Something must be done to bring about a different state of things," said the deacon. "There is no question about *that*. I think," he added dolefully, "we

had better summon a special church meeting to consider the matter."

This was the very measure that Copperfox was desirous to carry out. He eagerly commended the suggestion therefore, and the two friends spent the remainder of the evening in elaborating their scheme of operations.

The reader has probably come to the conclusion that the deficit was very considerable. He would hardly suppose that these two men would talk in this way if the arrears were very small, and if Grange Street were really in a much better condition financially than she had been in many previous periods of her history, when no particular alarm had been excited. The fact is, that the debt amounted to exactly seven pounds—neither more nor less. It could easily have been liquidated by Copperfox himself, had he been disposed to be liberal. But then he was not disposed to be liberal. He had made up his mind that he would not give a penny. The expenses connected with Grange Street had for

months past been borne almost entirely by the little band who continued loyal to Mr. Holland, and Copperfox was well aware that their resources were pretty well drained by reason of a certain additional outlay recently made upon the chapel.

There were of course many ways in which the money might have been raised without calling a "business meeting" upon the subject. Had Copperfox been well-disposed he would at once have suggested, for example, that a popular lecturer should be brought down from London on some week-night, and there would have been the usual accompaniments of bills, shilling tickets, etc. Or he would have suggested a bazaar. In former times a great deal of money had been obtained at Grange Street by means of bazaars. The ladies, with Mrs. Copperfox at their head, had quite revelled in them, and they had passed off with considerable *éclat*. But now the times were changed. Had a bazaar been suggested to Mrs. Copperfox she would probably have fainted at the bare idea of

such a thing. It was not to be thought of for a moment. And then—a tea-meeting. Copperfox had known tea-meetings to be very refreshing seasons, in more senses than one. They had been a very useful resource in cases of need like the present. But Copperfox would feel it his duty to keep away from any such gathering, were one to be held at Grange Street in order to meet the present emergency. Moreover, he would feel it his duty to keep all his friends away. In short, nothing would serve the purpose but a special church meeting. No lecturer would secure hearers; no bazaar could be furnished with fancy articles; no tea-meeting could be held; and this debt of seven pounds, although the opposition would have laughed at ten times the amount if they had been disposed to raise it, was to prove a quicksand on which the obnoxious minister was to sink and be lost to their sight for ever.

On the following Friday evening the regular business meeting was held, at which the time was to be fixed for the *special*

meeting. There was a large attendance, for it was known that Mr. Flint meant to read a balance-sheet containing an account of the income and expenditure of the society during the past year; and some of the people, who were in the secret, were in expectation of some pungent observations from the deacon, from Copperfox, and from Amos Flint, touching the deficiency in the funds. It was not generally known, however, that a *special* meeting was likely to arise, and Mr. Holland himself was quite in the dark as to the proposition that Mr. Flint and Copperfox had arranged should be made. The minister did not even know that there was a deficit at all, for the deacon was never very communicative upon this or any other subject. And even had he known it, he was quite aware that it was no unusual thing for a financial statement to show a balance due to the treasurer. He would therefore have experienced no uneasiness beyond what might naturally arise from the conviction that his enemies never allowed the slightest occasion

for manifesting their hostility to pass unimproved.

The balance-sheet was read by Mr. Flint amid profound silence, except that, when he announced the deficiency of seven pounds, Copperfox and one or two others uttered a groan, and looked, meanwhile, as if overcome by melancholy and despair. Then followed several speeches. The deacon, who seemed to find a secret pleasure in producing as much gloom as was possible, painted the present situation of affairs in very dark colours, and succeeded in making poor Mr. Holland and his friends thoroughly wretched. He was succeeded by Copperfox, who was quite eloquent upon the subject of the seven pounds.

"The chariot of the gospel, my brethren and sisters," he said excitedly, "is going downhill, in this place. We must put on the break."

"Hear, hear," said McGowan; and there was some applause from the opposition when the speaker resumed his seat.

After him rose Reuben Crock. This

worthy man was quite aware of the motives with which the matter had been brought forward. He also knew quite well that those who were loudest in their lamentations over the debt were the very people who would not assist to remove the burden with so much as their little finger. His honest countenance burned with indignation as he told them he wondered they dared to come to the meetings at all. As to Mr. Larberry, he plainly said they only wanted to raise contention and to make a disturbance, and asked them why it was they had not once put their hands in their pockets for the last twelve months? But they only smiled upon him, and he sat down thinking he might as well have remonstrated with the Scotch Express or the Falls of Niagara.

After a little more talk, Mr. Flint rose with his usual solemnity and said:

"I have brought the matter forward, dear brethren and sisters, although it is not our usual night for making the financial statement (the regular night, you know, will be in three months hence) because I

felt alarmed at this deficiency. I now propose," he added stiffly, "that a special church meeting be held on Friday evening next to take the matter into serious consideration." This motion was formally carried, and thus the minister's party were challenged to another trial of strength, and every one knew that next Friday evening would decide the fortunes of Mr. Holland so far as his connection with Oxbury was concerned.

As Copperfox was taking his comfortable supper in the back parlour that night, he said to his wife :

"Do you know, an idea came into my mind as I was at the meeting."

"What about, pray?" asked Mrs. Copperfox grimly. "Do you mean an idea how the money is to be raised?"

"Oh dear no, my love; not about that matter at all. Quite a different thing. It has to do with Mr. Maxforth, the Rector."

"Well, what about him?"

"Just this, my love. I have a suspicion that he and Mr. Holland have a private

understanding between them, and—mark this—I believe that all this talk about the Rector being about to marry Squire Cornford's daughter is nonsense. Mr. Maxforth has quite another lady in view. Now, my love—*who* do you think she is?"

"Don't waste time in idle questions, but go on," replied Mrs. Copperfox, whose interest was awakened.

"You remember," said her spouse complacently, "the time when Miss Vaveley came on a visit to her sister at the chapel-house?"

"Ah! I see," remarked Mrs. Copperfox, taking a deep breath.

"The Rector called there twice, you recollect, during Miss Vaveley's stay, and then afterwards it came to my ears through Dame Crock that he had been to see her at a place called Seftwick, where her mother lives."

Mr. Copperfox of course referred to the Rector's first visit, not the second.

"I heard," he continued, "that he was in the neighbourhood by accident, and

people thought nothing of it; but I now firmly believe he is in love with her, and they mean to be married some time, and Mr. Holland knows all about it."

The reader is better informed than Mr. Copperfox upon this last point.

"Your idea is not a bad one," said Mrs. Copperfox, who had listened intently, "but you may be mistaken."

"I don't think I am," he replied.

"Well," said his wife eagerly, "you had better try to find out if the case is as you say. If it is, all Oxbury will be in a ferment about it. But in making your inquiries be as secret and careful as you can."

CHAPTER III.

HURDALE.

VIOLET VAVELEY was not one of those girls whose sorrows, real or imaginary, eat into their hearts by reason of their constant inactivity and moodiness. Ever since the memorable day when Clement Maxforth had told her of his love, and she, constrained by sisterly affection and her sense of the fitness of things, had refused him, she had been busy in many ways. And yet she had a hard fight of it. She had reason to believe that her lover had been hurt and offended, as well as humbled, by the manner of her refusal. This was a sore trouble to her. Her answer might have been kind as well as firm. She told

herself it had been rude and unfeeling. Perhaps the reader will acquit her of this charge, nevertheless Violet's self-accusations were numerous and severe.

It was hard, too, that inexorable fate should have compelled her to repulse a suitor like Clement Maxforth. She knew that she loved as well as honoured him; that she loved him with a complete devotion; that she would count it perfect bliss and a high distinction to sacrifice her very life for his sake. To the end of her days her heart would beat with happiness and pride to remember that such a man had asked her to be his wife. But his great worth and her intense love for him sometimes deepened her sorrow as she reflected upon the prize she had lost. He had parted from her in anger, and they were to be sundered for ever! These were the thoughts that filled her mind; and however diligent she might endeavour to be, we can scarcely wonder that she was occasionally pensive and abstracted.

At one time her mother feared she would

have a grave illness. The girl refused her food, and she could get no sleep. Indeed the trouble at her heart threatened to carry her speedily to the grave. But she rallied, for she never ceased to do battle with her weakness.

In many ways she tried to be useful, as though, by keeping her mind and body continually at work, she strove to prevent her heart from breaking. She had always been a good daughter, but now she was more thoughtful for her mother than she had ever been, anticipating her wants and relieving her of her household duties whenever she could prevail upon her mother to permit it. The girl cared little for society, and was seldom seen to speak to any one. Occasionally she would take her sketch-book and wander to an unfrequented part of the shore, where she would sit for some hours, returning home with clever drawings of shipping or bits of coast scenery. But these excursions were only taken at rare intervals, and even then she seemed to have but little pride or pleasure in them.

To the fishermen's huts she would often go, however, especially when there was sickness among the poor folk; and never did she enter their homes without a hearty welcome, for the simple people loved her.

To Mr. Deane she was especially useful at this time. Mr. Deane was the parish clergyman—a tall, handsome man, with hair and beard prematurely white. He was not more than five and forty, but his snowy hair and his spectacles made him look older. Living in the snug, ivy-covered vicarage behind the church, and blessed with a good income, a pretty wife, and two healthy youngsters, you would have thought Mr. Deane had reason to be contented. But he was not contented, any more than the rest of us. Mr. Deane disliked his diocese in general, and had an intense disgust for his own parish in particular. From morning till night he ceased not to bewail his lot because he was doomed, as he termed it, "to spend his days in a miserable hole like Seftwick." His

wife thrived and his youngsters flourished, but the Vicar himself drooped and pined, and lifted up his voice continually in lamentation and woe. The climate disagreed with him, he said. It was too cold. His parishioners displeased him; they were boorish. The size of the parish was another grievance; he had not enough work to do. In short, Mr. Deane wanted to get to London. He had plenty of energy; he asked for an adequate sphere for its exercise. It was a shame, he declared, that he should vegetate at Seftwick, when earnest men were so much needed in the metropolis.

To this unquiet clergyman Violet Vaveley was of great assistance. She played the organ in church with so much precision and ability that even he, fastidious as he was, professed himself satisfied. And then she was the only "district visitor" in the parish except Mrs. Deane; and the Vicar sometimes remarked that "she turned the work over and over" better than a curate could have done. She helped him in the

school, too; and was so persevering and assiduous, and the children loved her so much, that the same authority was heard to protest he really did not know how he could manage without her.

In this way Violet passed her time, being neither inert nor fretful, notwithstanding the sorrow at her heart.

She was sitting with her mother one morning in the little front room of the cottage, talking about Mr. Praxton, who by the invitation of the Vicar of the parish had been preaching special sermons in Seftwick church on the previous day, when a ring came to the door bell, and a minute afterwards Mr. Deane and the Vicar of St. Jude's were announced by the servant. Violet turned pale and trembled a little as she rose to receive them. She knew that Mr. Praxton was staying for a day or two at the Vicarage, and she had been wondering if he would call upon them after what had passed. He shook hands with all his former cordiality and without embarrassment. It was better that it should be so;

and Violet was thankful that she might still count him as a friend.

"Your village smacks of the brine all over to-day," he pleasantly said to her when they were all seated. "I never noticed the saltness of the atmosphere so much before, I think."

"Yes," she said with a sweet smile, "we do observe it more sometimes. The air is particularly bright and fresh this morning."

"I should think," said Mr. Praxton eagerly, "you are thankful there are no manufactories in your village; no furnaces, and that sort of thing, to darken and poison it. Seftwick is better off than those places across the bay there." They were looking out of the window, and could see Torwick and Eskham in the distance.

"Yes," she answered; "I should not like to live at Eskham."

"What dismal places they must be," said the Vicar, "with those furnace-fires going night and day, and the great heaps of slag, and ashes, and rubbish. But your village is as clean as a new pin. I was

congratulating my friend, Mr. Deane, on his having such a healthy parish."

"And I was telling him, Miss Vaveley, that his congratulations were thrown away," said Mr. Deane, the gleam of his spectacles flashing suddenly upon her. "He knows quite well that the very marrow in my bones is frozen in this place."

Mr. Praxton laughed.

"I tell Mr. Deane he had better make himself contented," he said.

"Yes," remarked Violet's mother, politely; "we should all be very sorry if Mr. Deane were to leave the parish."

"But my health suffers," moaned Mr. Deane.

Mr. Praxton laughed again.

"I tell Mr. Deane," he said, "that every time I come to Seftwick I think him looking better. Do you not think him looking better than he did a year ago, Mrs. Vaveley?"

"I certainly do," she replied.

Mr. Deane shook his snowy beard and waved his hands deprecatingly.

"Perhaps Hurdale would suit my friend better, then," said Mr. Praxton slily.

Violet and her mother looked inquiringly at the speaker. They did not comprehend his meaning.

"Have you not heard?" said he.

The ladies replied that no intelligence had reached them regarding the town in question.

"I thought you knew," said Mr. Praxton apologetically. "The Rector of Hurdale died last week. The living is vacant. I was merely suggesting that since Seftwick is not to my friend's mind, he might be disposed to accept the living of Hurdale, if it were offered to him."

"It is not likely to be offered to me," said Mr. Deane. "Besides, the air is nearly as cold there. I want to get to the south of England."

"The living of Hurdale is a very important one, is it not?" asked Mrs. Vaveley.

"Very," replied Mr. Praxton cheerfully; "it is one of the best in the diocese. The income is about a thousand a year."

"It is in the gift of the bishop, I suppose?"

"Well, no," said the Vicar of St. Jude's; "the patron is Sir Henry Bellington."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Vaveley. "I remember seeing the gentleman. He and Lady Bellington were staying in the village here, last summer. That portly red-whiskered man, you remember, Violet," she continued, turning to her daughter, "who rented the white house on the parade."

"I remember him," said Violet quietly.

"You may depend he will give the living to Mr. Deane then, if he has been staying here, and attended my friend's ministrations," said Mr. Praxton, laughing. "Was he regular in his attendance at the parish church during that time?"

"He did not miss a single service," replied Mr. Deane; "but I was suffering from such a dreadful hoarseness that he could not possibly hear me. These east winds at Seftwick will be the death of me."

"Did he tell you he could not hear?" asked Mr. Praxton, smiling incredulously.

"Oh no," said Mr. Deane; "he would not be likely to tell me that. He is a perfect gentleman. He and Lady Bellington were very agreeable."

"Well," said Mr. Praxton, "I missed a great chance myself last January."

"In what way?"

"Why, Sir Henry came to my church at Scamborough one Sunday morning in that month; but I happened not to be the preacher on the occasion."

"Violet's large dark eyes were fixed intently upon him as he spoke. They seemed to dilate, and a deep flush mantled suddenly upon her cheeks. Mr. Praxton was not unobservant of the change, and he paused a little before he proceeded.

"Of course," he said, "it was quite by accident that Sir Henry came in. I suppose he happened to be staying for the day in the town. But, as I said, I was not the preacher. It was a friend of mine——"

"Yes—who was he?"

"Mr. Maxforth."

The name thrilled through Violet's slender frame—her head began to swim; but she controlled herself with a strong effort, and sat silent, still listening intently.

"I do not know him," said Mr. Deane. Mrs. Vaveley, who sat next to her daughter, gently put her hand upon Violet's, and pressed it tenderly. The Vicar of St. Jude's noticed the action. He could not any longer be in doubt whether or not this beautiful girl loved the man who, like himself, had been rejected.

"My friend is the Rector of Oxbury," he explained to Mr. Deane. "We have known each other intimately for several years."

"Ah! Perhaps *he* will get the living of Hurdale," said Mr. Deane, who was near-sighted and, notwithstanding his spectacles, had not observed Violet's emotion or her mother's sympathy. "Is Mr. Maxforth a good preacher?"

"Well; he is not by any means a pulpit orator," replied Mr. Praxton gravely, "but

he is an intensely earnest man, and his words carry great weight with all who know his character."

The visitors now rose to go.

"We have been speculating as to the future disposal of this living, Mrs. Vaveley," said the Vicar of St. Jude's, "and after all it will no doubt be given to a perfect stranger to us. But I must have my little jest, you know."

"As far as I am concerned," said Mr. Deane, "your friend the Rector or any one else is perfectly welcome to Hurdale. I do not want any north-country living. I would like to get to London."

"And therefore my friend Mr. Deane is sure to have Hurdale; for not to want a thing is the surest way to get it."

Saying these words in his pleasantest manner, Mr. Praxton shook hands with the two ladies, and the visitors left the house.

CHAPTER IV.

TIMELY HELP.

The suspicion that had entered the mind of Copperfox regarding the Rector's proceedings was becoming more fully developed day by day. The former had made some careful inquiries among the servants at Poppleton Hall and elsewhere, and had ascertained that Mr. Maxforth was not paying his addresses to either of the squire's daughters, and that the report of a marriage in that quarter was entirely without foundation. Copperfox was an astute man, as the reader knows, and when he came to compare and weigh the different circumstances within his knowledge—he had not of course been made aware of the

Rector's second visit to Seftwick—he felt convinced that it was Miss Vaveley, and not Emily Cornford, whom the young clergyman wished to marry. He believed that Mr. Holland knew all about it, but that the minister chose to keep the matter secret; and this was the very reason why Copperfox was determined to find it out and reveal it before the world. He and his wife at this time instituted a constant watch both upon the rectory and the chapel-house; but nothing came of it, since no visits were interchanged, nor were Mr. Maxforth and Philip ever seen to speak to each other. The latter, indeed, having no suspicion of the Rector's love for his sister-in-law (the secret having been faithfully kept both by Violet and her mother), and fearing the jealousy of his people, had of course no occasion to comport himself otherwise than dissenting ministers generally do behave towards the spiritual rulers of their parishes. At present Copperfox found himself baffled. He could discover nothing. Having settled in his own mind

that it was now expedient to call in the aid of a friend, and that no one was so suitable for his purpose as Amos Flint, he took advantage of an early opportunity to communicate his ideas to that young man. He opened the subject very carefully to him one day by saying:

"About our pastor now—or rather I should say Mr. Holland, who calls himself the pastor of Grange Street—do you not think, dear brother, that he ought to take the church-members into his confidence in all matters touching the welfare of our Zion?"

"Most assuredly he ought," returned Amos quickly.

"I have often thought," continued Copperfox, "that there are many little matters, even his own domestic affairs, and the conduct of his own household, on which his people might give him good advice if he would seek it."

"Undoubtedly," assented Amos again.

"You see," Copperfox went on, "we are, as it were, a family of brothers and sisters,

and the minister is one of us ; and if he mistrusts us, or hides any important matter from us, it is wrong, and we ought to mark our sense of his conduct by bringing his sin home to him."

"Yes, I quite agree with you."

"Well now, he is in league with the Church of England all this time—I always told you he was a churchman in his heart —he is in league with the Rector, and the Rector is going to marry that sister-in-law of his, Miss Vaveley. He dare not tell us this, but it is all settled ; and we shall be dragged into this alliance with Babylon blind-folded, without we bestir ourselves and put a stop to it."

"But you cannot prove that Mr. Maxforth has this intention, I presume," said Amos. "It is merely your supposition."

"But, brother Amos," said Copperfox, "the proofs are to be had, if we only knew how to get them. As soon as I began to have my doubts that all was not right, I sought for proof, but, as you say, I have not found any. Now it is no use watching

and making inquiries in Oxbury without we do the same at Seftwick as well, where Miss Vaveley is living. If we only had some kind friend who could keep his eye on the young lady, and report to us what he finds out over there, we should soon have proof."

"But whom could we get?" asked Amos, thoughtfully.

"That is the difficulty, dear brother," replied Copperfox.

Amos cogitated a little, and then a happy thought came into his mind.

"There is a relative of mine living not far from Seftwick. I think he might be useful to us," he said.

"A relative of yours!" exclaimed Copperfox, gleefully. "I am thankful to hear it, but I was not aware that you had any connections in the north of England."

"Only this one," returned Amos; "he is a cousin of mine. But now I must be going," he added, moving away. "I will think the matter over carefully, and see you again about it. Good-morning."

We will now relate what steps were being taken in the meantime by Mr. Holland to meet the financial difficulty mentioned in the last chapter but one.

It may seem incredible, considering the ease and rapidity with which immense sums of money are continually being raised by dissenting bodies for various objects, that a deficiency of seven pounds in the funds of Grange Street should be deemed a sufficient occasion for alarm, and should lead to the calling of a "special church meeting." To some it may appear even more extraordinary that the minister should entertain any doubt as to whether or not these seven pounds could be obtained. That he did entertain some doubt is certain; and, in order to understand why he did so, we must take into account his inexperience, his poverty, the mischief that had been wrought among his people by their dissensions, the heavy pecuniary burdens that had fallen upon his adherents, and his own timidity in all matters relating to money. The art of procuring the sinews of war has

been brought to great perfection in many similar quarters ; but poor Mr. Holland was totally unacquainted with that art. Moreover, he was labouring under the disadvantage that, if he took counsel with his deacon upon the subject, that functionary neither could nor would help him out of the difficulty. Upon two things the minister's mind was made up—he would not find the money himself, and he would not ask his supporters for any. He believed they would willingly have made up the sum required, but their burdens had been very great, and he would not let them. The greater part of the seven pounds must be found, if possible, by some well-to-do stranger or friendly neighbour. How often is the dissenting minister but little more than a collecting-machine or begging-letter-writer!

It was necessary, too, that this money should be obtained immediately. Should he be forced to meet his opponents empty-handed at the meeting, the mortification he would experience would be more intense

than any to which he had yet been subjected, and their innuendoes and reproaches more unsparing. There were six days before him, and he felt that unless help came before those days had elapsed, he would hardly have courage to attend the meeting, and would be constrained to fly. The time was very short; it seemed the shorter because at present he had not thought of any one to whom he could make application. It is true, it occurred to him that help might be obtained from old Silas Winstock. The miller was a true friend, he knew, and could easily spare the money; but he was unwilling to ask him for a donation, for several reasons. Winstock was not one of his hearers; he was harassed by many calls in connection with the Calvinistic Meeting-house; the minister dreaded lest the pleasure he derived from their personal intercourse should be impaired; and lastly, he thought that the miller had already given him so many proofs of his goodwill, that he would prefer going to a stranger.

On the morrow after the church meeting described in the last chapter but one, Mr. Holland sat in his front parlour, discussing with his wife the subject of the debt, and how it was to be liquidated.

"I think, dear," said Kate, after they had been talking some time, and several schemes had been suggested, but only to be discarded as impracticable—"I think, if I were you, I would go and ask Sir John Stoneleigh to help you."

The minister opened his eyes wide in astonishment.

"Sir John Stoneleigh!" he said. "What nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense. He is the member for the county. I would, indeed," returned his wife, who had started up from her seat in the excitement which the sudden thought had produced. "I feel sure he would give you a cheque for five pounds in a moment, and be glad to do it."

Mr. Holland reflected a moment or two, and then said:

"I believe he would, Kate. I will try him."

"And may I go with you?" asked his wife, eagerly. "I shall enjoy the walk so much."

Half an hour afterwards, they started together for the baronet's house. This was situated about three miles from Oxbury in the midst of a noble park that was fenced in from the forest which surrounded it. Their way led through many a dell and dingle, and the leafy coverts on every hand resounded with the glad notes of myriads of birds and insects. At length they reached a swelling upland, covered with gorse and fern, from whence they obtained a view of Sir John's mansion, while the lodge stood almost at their feet. On enquiring at the lodge, however, if the baronet were at home, Mr. Holland was answered in the negative. Sir John, he was told, was in Yorkshire, and would not be home for several weeks. He was furnished with the baronet's address by the woman who had given this information, and then the minister and his wife retraced their steps. On reaching the chapel-house, Mr. Holland

despatched a letter to Sir John, describing the circumstances of his people, their urgent need of help in the present crisis, and asking for a donation. Two days were spent in anxious expectation, and on the morning of the third there came a cheque for four pounds, with a kind letter from the baronet stating that he had heard of Mr. Holland, his difficulties and the work he was doing, and expressing the warmest sympathy and goodwill. There was joy in the chapel-house that day. The minister was now quite prepared to meet his adversaries, and was even impatient for the hour to arrive when the "special church meeting" would begin. In the meantime he privately acquainted Dame Crock and her husband with the good news, which caused them great delight, the former exclaiming:

"It is always so, sir; when the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses comes, as the sayin' is."

Garrel and Larberry also heard about the baronet's cheque in the course of the day, and were equally pleased. The in-

telligence spread no further, however, for the minister's friends wished to prepare a surprise for the opposition as most likely to accomplish the result they so much desired. As to poor Philip, he now resolved to give a pound out of his own pocket, and to appeal to such of the disaffected as might be present at the meeting to make up the remainder.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOMFITED.

"You were saying the other day, brother Amos, that there is a relative of yours living not far from Seftwick, who might be useful to us in finding out the truth about that young lady and the Rector. What is the name of the place where he lives, dear brother?" asked Copperfox.

"The name of the place is Eskham," replied his friend eagerly. "It is a small fishing station lying on the south shore of Seftwick Bay. I was examining a map of the neighbourhood this morning and I calculate that Eskham is but four miles or so from the watering-place where Miss

Vaveley lives. Seftwick is on the opposite shore of the bay."

"Four miles or so by water, I suppose?" remarked Copperfox. "Of course the distance is considerably greater by land?"

"Oh yes," replied Amos Flint, "but that does not make much difference, for I remember my relative saying he frequently had to go to Seftwick on business, so he could make inquiries for us without much inconvenience if we asked him."

"Does your relative bear the same name as yourself, brother Amos?" asked Copperfox.

"No; his name is Shotton. He is my father's sister's son."

"Well now, had we better ask him to do this thing for us, do you think, dear brother?"

"I should say so decidedly," returned Amos Flint. "He is just the man for our purpose. I will write this evening and ask him to favour me by ascertaining whether a clergyman named Maxforth is paying his addresses to Miss Vaveley, whether a

marriage is in contemplation or whether any communications of any kind pass between them."

"Do so, dear brother; and remember that in this matter we are fulfilling a duty we owe to our Zion. If this alliance is contemplated, and Mr. Holland knows all about it, as I believe he does, and is keeping it a secret, we shall be doing a good service to all our brothers and sisters at Grange Street by bringing it to light and, if possible, preventing it."

"Quite so," returned Amos. "I will write to Eskham to-night then, as soon as I return home from the church meeting. You will be at the church meeting, I suppose?"

"If I am spared, dear brother, I shall. It is our duty to be there, you know; and should we find that the deficiency has not been made up we must take strong measures."

The friends then parted for a few hours.

Meanwhile, the minister at Grange Street

was awaiting the said meeting with composure and satisfaction.

The fact that Sir John Stoneleigh, who had generously helped him out of his difficulty, was not a dissenter but a staunch churchman, had given additional value, in the eyes of Mr. Holland, to that cheque for four pounds which had come so opportunely. It was another illustration of the injustice of a charge often made by Messrs. Flint and Copperfox, to the effect that the members of the establishment would never willingly assist any other body of Christians, but would oppress and persecute them whenever they had a chance of doing so. The minister had never believed the accusation, and he was glad to have been so pleasantly confirmed in his scepticism in the present instance.

A few minutes before the meeting began Mr. Copperfox, Amos Flint, and a few other members of the opposition were talking together under the lime trees at the side of the chapel. They had heard nothing of the baronet's cheque. That was a secret

locked for the present in the breasts of a few of the minister's supporters. Mr. Copperfox and his companions supposed that the position of affairs was the same as when they had assembled on the previous Friday. Had they been aware of the efforts Mr. Holland had been making in the meantime, and of the success with which those efforts had been crowned, it is probable, since their chief object in attending was to annoy him, that they would not have taken the trouble to be present on this occasion. But they did not dream that the greater part of the deficiency was swept away and that the minister expected to have the remainder cleared off before the meeting should separate.

The feelings, therefore, with which the members of the opposition were coming together, may be readily understood. They were sentiments of exultation and pride. Mr. Copperfox's party were rejoicing in the immediate prospect of having everything their own way. They believed they were about to ride, rough-shod, over the

minister and all his belongings. This may be gathered from the conversation which passed under the lime trees, when, as we have said, some of the more turbulent among them were discussing the subject with the view of preparing themselves for the business that lay before them.

"Don't you think," said Amos Flint, addressing the group in his most winning manner; "don't you think we had better speak out plainly? Why should we be so reluctant to express our sentiments? We are all agreed that we cannot conscientiously give anything towards raising this sum of money: we are all agreed that we never can and never will sit under Mr. Holland: we are all agreed that there must be another minister before there can be any improvement in the state of our funds, or any increase in the numbers of our church and congregation. Let us, then, speak our mind upon these points without reserve. A grand opportunity is presented of opening the entire question—of taking a review of all the circumstances through

which our society has lately passed. We shall be greatly in fault if we do not use this opportunity to the utmost."

"I think the same," said McGowan, endeavouring to look as amiable as the scowl which habitually sat upon his countenance would allow. "We have minced matters too long," he continued, clenching his right hand, and raising it with much energy. "I for one will make him wince to-night, I promise you. You shall see him writhe in his chair while I am speaking."

"Very good," said Copperfox, who had been looking towards the street, and had observed the approach of Dame Crock and several other adherents of the minister; "your remarks do you great credit, brother McGowan; but," he added, lowering his voice to a whisper, and pushing his friends forward, "we had better go in. It is quite seven o'clock." And, wisely avoiding the advancing group, the party entered the school-room and shut the door behind them.

Let the reader also enter, and observe what passes.

The company assembled presents the same features that we have described on previous occasions, except that the disaffected have mustered a stronger force to-night than usual, in expectation of the attack to be made on Mr. Holland. He is seated in his accustomed place at the table, and it is noticed by several persons that he appears self-possessed and even cheerful, which they consider strange under the circumstances. The more turbulent members of the opposition have taken their seats immediately in front of him, while Mr. Flint, whom he had privately informed respecting the cheque, and whose eyes are bent steadily upon the floor, is seated at his right hand. Dame Crock and her husband are on the left, and other supporters of the minister are dispersed about the room. Garrel is again absent. He is known, however, to be warmly attached to Mr. Holland's cause, and the circumstance excites no particular notice, since the nature

of his business frequently prevented his attendance at week-night meetings.

After a few preliminaries, the serious business of the evening commenced.

"Dear friends," said the minister, "this special meeting was called in order that we might take into consideration the debt of seven pounds, to which Mr. Flint directed our attention last Friday night."

At these words every eye was turned upon the speaker, and the greatest stillness prevailed.

Mr. Holland proceeded:

"When the individual Christian, my friends, is brought into difficulty and distress, he often finds, as you know, that God makes the hour of his despair the hour of his deliverance. 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' That is a familiar saying. Now, the same thing may be said of communities. God frequently interposes for them just at the time when they are giving up all hope. This will be the case, I believe, with ourselves."

The minister, while speaking thus in

general terms, and looking straight before him, saw Copperfox and Snooley exchange a quick and meaning glance. That glance seemed to him to say this: "We know what you are driving at, but we are not going to be talked into giving up what we have purposed to do. You would like to put us off with hopes and promises, but we are too wise to be deluded. When you sit down and our turn comes, we will demolish your opening speech in a moment. We will point once more to the debt; we will remind you that it is still remaining, and is likely to remain; for, without *us,* you cannot meet it, and *we* do not mean to help you."

Mr. Holland went on with his address, however, just as if that glance had not been seen and understood. He was quite willing that his opponents should enjoy their imaginary triumph a few moments longer, since he well knew that the simple announcement he was about to make respecting Sir John Stoneleigh's cheque would alter the aspect of affairs considerably.

Still keeping this in reserve, therefore, he continued to speak in the same strain as at first, gradually preparing his audience for the statement with which his address would close.

"And now," he said in conclusion, "I am glad to be able to give a pleasing illustration of what I have been saying. I have some good news to tell you."

He paused here, while an expression of the intensest interest and curiosity appeared upon the countenances of his hearers. Copperfox and his party, at the mention of "good news," looked serious and crestfallen.

"I have to tell you," continued the minister, "that I received yesterday morning, from a gentleman in the neighbourhood, a cheque for four pounds, so that the greater part of the debt is already removed. If we add to this sum the sovereign promised by Brother Crock, and another sovereign from myself, there will remain only one pound to be made up,

which can be done this evening, I hope, before we separate."

He then sat down, and an opportunity was presented for Copperfox or any one else to address the meeting. The opportunity, however, was not embraced. Anxious as the disaffected had been to "speak their mind" when Mr. Holland began, not one of them now rose to his feet, or had any desire to do so. They were completely dumbfounded.

This remark does not apply to Mr. Flint, who, seeing that the minister's party was likely to prevail in this contest, thought it prudent to rise and say :

"I am exceedingly pleased to hear about this donation of four pounds, and I am sure the church feels much obliged to the gentleman who sent it. The sum that we now have to raise is so small, that it would not be creditable to us if we did not find the money amongst us this evening. I will give five shillings."

"And here is the sovereign I promised," said Mr. Crock, rising and placing it upon

the table. "I give it with a hearty good will."

All those who belonged to the party of order immediately followed the example of the old man, and handed in various sums. The alacrity with which they did so contrasted strongly with the sullen and motionless attitudes of the disaffected, who sat as if stunned by the unlooked-for position of affairs. Nothing, indeed, could be more striking than their chagrin and dismay. Had it not been that they dreaded the consequences of the movement, they would indubitably have left the room, and so escaped from a position which rendered them uncomfortable in the extreme. As it was, they sat a mark for scorn and contempt.

Mr. Holland now began to appeal for help to several of them individually—a circumstance that aggravated their misery, although it was a perfectly legitimate proceeding on such an occasion. The first of his opponents whom he so addressed was Mr. Snooley. This young man at length

responded, very unwillingly, by promising a shilling. Mr. Clatts, when appealed to in a similar manner, shook his head and buttoned his pockets. An application to Amos Flint was equally unsuccessful. The minister then addressed Copperfox.

"Come, Brother Copperfox," said he, "there are still a few shillings needed; won't you help us with a donation? You have so frequently told us you have the welfare of this community at heart, that we naturally look to you in an emergency like this."

But Copperfox had determined that he would not give a penny, and he adhered to his resolution now with much firmness. Moreover, his wife was behind him, and the regard he had to his domestic peace sufficiently restrained any inclination he might have had to yield to the pressure of circumstances. Muttering one or two incoherent words, which conveyed a refusal of the minister's request, he turned his head away, and remained mute and

apparently stupefied for the rest of the evening.

"Perhaps Brother McGowan will give us a small sum?" said the minister, turning to that young man.

The latter seemed goaded to fury by the supposition, and replied fiercely:

"No, I won't."

It did not signify, however, for the few shillings required could easily be obtained afterwards from absent friends. Garrel and Larberry, for instance, were quite able and willing, as everybody knew, to find them, as indeed they actually did.

There was no reason, therefore, why the meeting should be prolonged, and Mr. Holland prepared to give out the closing hymn. To the discomfited foe this was a most welcome movement. Their defeat had been so signal, and their mortification so intense, that they were longing to be released, and many of them were inwardly saying they would never venture into the room again as long as they lived. They

would join themselves to that little society at Peeble's Lane; they would assist Mr. Gloss in his endeavours to raise funds for a chapel there, and to obtain a settled minister; and they would try to manage things better than they had been managed at Grange Street. These were the thoughts which occupied the breasts of Copperfox and his friends while that closing hymn was being sung.

The minister's friends, meanwhile, were rejoicing in the prospect of being soon relieved of their troublesome brethren's society. The former were well persuaded that the cause at Grange Street would flourish when they were gone; they felt certain that better days were coming, and that the only losers by the change would be these malcontents who had rendered themselves hateful to all right-thinking men by their intolerance and their unreasonableness. Thus, when the meeting was dismissed, it was generally understood that the disaffected had given up the struggle as hopeless, and that this was the last

church meeting they would attend. The steps which they actually did take, and the final issue of their undertaking, in the cases of some of them at least, shall now be truthfully narrated.

CHAPTER VI.

LARBERRY'S PET.

"HAVE you written that letter to Eskham, Brother Amos?" asked Copperfox, when he met the deacon's cousin the next day.

"I have; I despatched it last night after the meeting, and shall get a reply in two or three days, or perhaps longer, if Mr. Shotton's business does not take him to Seftwick immediately. We shall not have to wait very long, however, in any case."

"But Mr. Shotton may find serious difficulties in his path, dear brother, which may delay his letter considerably. He will have to be cautious, you know; and time is precious to us."

"We must wait patiently and take our chance about that," returned Amos Flint.

"Might it not be well to make a bold stroke here at Oxbury," suggested Copperfox, with a keen glance at his friend. "We have been beating about the bush all this time; suppose now that we ask Mr. Holland point blank if the case is as we suppose? We might get at the truth that way at once."

"Well, yes; we might, certainly," returned Amos doubtfully: "but yet—I don't know. He might ask us what concern it is of ours, especially as we no longer belong to Grange Street. For I suppose after what passed last night you have left the place altogether, like myself?"

"Yes, I have left the place," said Copperfox, with an accent of disgust, "and I shall attend no more of its business meetings. I shall settle down at Peeble's Lane. But still, if I ever have an opportunity I shall put the question to the minister."

Poor Mr. Holland, who of course was not anticipating the cross-examination in

store for him, and who even yet had learned nothing regarding the position of affairs at the Rectory and at Seftwick—had begun at this time to feel serious misgivings as to the supposed advantages of the dissenting system. This is scarcely to be wondered at. Surely he had seen enough to be weary of it, if any man ever had in this world. And he was becoming weary of it. Its monthly business meetings, furnishing so many opportunities for wrangling and division, its popular voting, its lay diaconate, making the minister a mere tool and plaything, its narrowness and bigotry, these and many more of its features were now giving him food for bitter reflections, and he was sighing for release from its bondage. He had learned, too, that his was not a solitary case. To his great sorrow he had discovered that there were hundreds of ministers in the country as badly off as himself and undergoing as many hardships and mortifications. Some of them, he knew, were better men than himself, more gifted and with fewer faults, but

yet they were buffeted and trodden upon as much or more than he was. Their congregations, too, quarrelled as often and as ridiculously as his own people at Grange Street. Hardly any Dissenting society, indeed, enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity. Sooner or later there was sure to be an outbreak of some unpleasantness or other. There had been so many of these outbreaks in his own church, that he could now hardly pass a single day without trembling and anxiety, lest some new and unforeseen trouble should arise, some fresh root of bitterness spring up. At the present time there was the promise of a little quietness, since most of the turbulent spirits had at last taken themselves off; but he felt quite sure that the quietness would be of very short duration. He might look for a squall at any moment. Thus the poor minister was sorely exercised in spirit, and the enthusiasm with which he had commenced his career at Oxbury had abated very materially.

He had not had time for reflection until

now, and therefore these misgivings had not tortured him. While the warrior is fighting he does not feel the smart of his wounds; it is when the battle is over and the excitement is passed that they gall him. So it was with this young man. He had been too busy, too much occupied with his hand-to-hand conflict, to think about theories and systems. But now that his enemies had retired from the field, he had leisure to count the scars he had received, and to criticise the campaign.

He was quite certain the war was not over. Perhaps the fighting would be hotter and more desperate in the future than it had been in the past. At any rate he must watch, and be prepared for fresh assaults, from whatever quarter they might come.

Just at present, however, affairs at Grange Street were a little less discouraging. Mr. Holland's ascendancy seemed likely to become complete. That special business meeting from which Mr. Copperfox's party had retired, covered with disgrace, had

proved, apparently, the turning point in the minister's fortunes, and from that night his personal influence steadily increased. The malcontents came no more to trouble him. Order and decorum prevailed, and something like organisation became apparent. Additions were made to the society, and Larberry and Dame Crock protested that the numbers attending the public services were as great as in Mr. Bathosley's time. In short, Mr. Holland's adherents became so united and energetic that the brightest anticipations were cherished of future prosperity.

Unfortunately, there was one person whose proceedings marred considerably the pleasure this state of things was calculated to produce. That person was Mr. Flint. His policy with regard to the "secessionists" was at this time causing considerable annoyance. It should be stated that although Mr. Copperfox and his party had withdrawn from Grange Street, their names still remained on the books of the society. Now it was the deacon's wish

that they should continue to be church members for an indefinite period and that they should even be elected to offices of trust, and discharge various important functions. What Mr. Flint's motives were it might be difficult to define with accuracy; at any rate the present chronicler will not attempt to specify them, lest he should do the worthy man an injustice. Suffice it to state that the deacon was now straining every nerve in order to prevent his late associates from being "dismissed" in a regular and formal manner to Peeble's Lane, and that he was also endeavouring for some reason or other to exclude Mr. Holland's supporters from any share in the government of the society to which they belonged. If, for example, an auditor was needed, or a secretary, or a "messenger" to a candidate, Mr. Flint generally proposed one or other of the "secessionists" as a suitable person to fill the office. For a time his efforts were submitted to in silence, but at length the society rose in rebellion. Mr. Flint had managed to secure the elec-

tion of one of the most virulent opposers of the minister as an auditor, when, one night, Garrel came down to the "church meeting" and said he must protest against the choice that had been made, and would decline to act as co-auditor with that person. Accordingly, another church-member was elected in place of the secessionist. This decision caused the deacon to desist from his efforts for a time, but he afterwards renewed them, and his stubbornness in this respect caused great distress at Grange Street. We shall soon see in what manner he was at last compelled to abandon his policy altogether.

Notwithstanding these occasional troubles, the church, as we have said, began now to present a brighter aspect. There was cohesion, and there was life. The members had set themselves to brush away the cobwebs of prejudice, to reform abuses, to improve their methods of working; and in one particular, especially, they showed their desire for progress to be genuine, namely, in their psalmody. Perhaps it

will not be deemed superfluous to record what was done by them in this respect.

Once upon a time the singing at Grange Street had been led by a violin, a flute, and a violoncello, the strains of which had proceeded from the gallery behind the pulpit. These, however, had long been banished from the chapel, and the psalmody had become entirely vocal. The choir-leader, at the period with which our story is concerned, was a good man who was passionately devoted to his art; but unfortunately his voice was a poor one, his method of teaching was not attractive, and the tunes he set were of a melancholy kind, or else were pitched in too high a key. Consequently he was not by any means popular either with the choir or the congregation. It not unfrequently happened that at public worship the people were quite unable to join in the tunes that were raised, and even the trained singers themselves were sometimes at fault, and the choir-leader would then sustain his part alone, going through the verses with great courage and

self-possession. It is not to be wondered at that this state of things caused considerable dissatisfaction. It had been stated that several strangers would have settled at Grange Street, and would have taken sittings, only they could not endure the solos from the choir leader. A change was therefore necessary. One day the members of the choir waited upon Mr. Holland, and asked him if he would train them on the week-night. There was, they said, a small harmonium in the school-room; their "practices" had been long neglected, etc., etc.; they would be very glad if he would consent to take them in hand. After some little consideration the minister yielded to their wishes; the "practices" recommenced under his personal direction; a new tune-book was introduced; and a complete revival in the service of song took place. Great interest was manifested in these proceedings by the congregation, many of whom began to attend the practices. Among these was our friend Larberry, whose heart and soul were entirely

thrown into the work in which Mr. Holland was now engaged. No one, indeed, could possibly take more pleasure in the meetings for practice than Larberry did. At length he suggested that a large and powerful harmonium should be purchased and set up in the chapel. Finding that the suggestion was well received by the minister, by the choir, and by the congregation, he began to bestir himself in the work of obtaining subscriptions and donations with so much zeal that in a short time as much as fifteen or sixteen pounds was obtained, and nearly as much more guaranteed. Meanwhile, a gentleman had come forward to assist Mr. Holland at the small harmonium, and from him a promise had been obtained that when the new instrument should be introduced, he would play it, statedly and gratuitously, at public worship. So far, therefore, everything was satisfactory. Unfortunately, however, the new movement had found an opponent in the person of Mr. Flint. Not only were the deacon's notions upon the subject of

psalmody somewhat antiquated, but he had several additional reasons for wishing to keep the harmonium out of the chapel, which we need not mention. Suffice it to say that the disfavour with which he viewed Larberry's exertions, caused some apprehension in several quarters, and tended not a little to increase Mr. Flint's unpopularity at this time. The subject was brought forward at a church meeting, and it was proposed and seconded "that an harmonium should be introduced into the chapel." After a long debate, in which the minister, Mr. Flint, Larberry, and others, took part, the motion was carried *nem. con.*, and the choir-leader resigned his post.

A few days afterwards the new instrument arrived from London, and the next thing to be considered was, in what part of the chapel it should stand. On this subject Mr. Holland asked the advice of the deacon again and again, but found him so crotchety and wrong-headed, that their consultations always ended in mutual bit-

terness of feeling. In this position of affairs Garrel and Larberry, with the choir and congregation to support them, strongly urged the minister to take the matter into his own hands, which he did, and the harmonium was stationed, amid great rejoicing, in a spot which was generally agreed to be the best that could have been chosen. When the first notes of the new instrument resounded through the chapel, the enthusiasm and rapture of Larberry were unbounded. Great was the excitement of the choir also, and loud and joyous were their voices as they sang to its accompaniment. From this time forth the harmonium, which was called "Larberry's pet," by reason of the affection he had for it, became a constant theme of conversation at Grange Street. The congregation now joined in the service of song on the Sunday with evident enjoyment, and all were agreed that the change had proved most successful.

One day Larberry called at the chapel-house and said to the minister,

"I have been thinking, sir, of something that might be done with advantage."

"What is that?" asked Mr. Holland, smiling.

"Why, you see, sir, New Year's Eve will soon be here, and I fancy if we were to give a little supper on that night to our choir it would do good."

"So it might," said the minister, thoughtfully.

"And then," continued Larberry, "if it met with your approval, after our little supper, we might hold a religious service—a kind of watch-night, you know."

"It is not a bad idea," said Mr. Holland.

"And I would suggest," continued Larberry, "that Mr. Flint be asked to make one of the party and give an address on the occasion."

"Certainly," responded the minister; "I will ask him to do so with pleasure."

"Then, if you please, sir, we will settle it so."

"Yes; I shall see Mr. Flint this evening, and I will mention it to him then."

CHAPTER VII.

LEAVING OXBURY.

On Mr. Maxforth's breakfast-table lay a couple of letters and a heap of circulars. The latter were always plentiful at the Rectory—it was in point of fact inundated with them. Fat circulars from wine and spirit merchants, alluring prospectuses of all kinds, catalogues of books, papers relating to ecclesiastical furniture, and life assurance companies—these came in shoals every day, and were deposited in the waste-paper basket. *That* was the fate of the circulars on this particular morning, and then the Rector took up one of the two letters. Opening it he read as follows :—

"The Vicarage, Kemborough,
"5th December, 187—.

"My Dear Sir,

"The Bishop of the Diocese is desirous of obtaining the opinion of the clergy: First, As to the increase of the Episcopate and the Division of the Diocese: and secondly, As to the Amendments desirable in the Ecclesiastical Dilapidations Act.

"I have therefore the pleasure of requesting you to meet with our Brethren of the Deanery of Kemborough at my house on Thursday the 14th December at 11 A.M.

"I trust also, if able to attend, that you will give me the pleasure of your company at luncheon after the meeting.

"An answer will much oblige, my dear sir,

"Yours very truly,
"D. R. Callinan,
"Rural Dean."

Now the Rector knew of no engagement that would prevent his accepting this invi-

tation and he resolved that he would go to Kemborough on the 14th. A rural dean's mandate is not a terrible one—not half so terrible, of course, as an archdeacon's, not to speak of a bishop's. When these latter dignitaries had summoned Mr. Maxforth to any of their visitations, he, being a law-abiding man, and usually going well in harness, had invariably obeyed the summons, but he had wondered in his own mind what the penalty would be if he should be recalcitrant. The speculation had always raised a smile, yet he had never failed to attend the visitations. As to Mr. Callinan's invitation it would not be disregarded, because the rural dean happened to be greatly liked by his clerical brethren, and also because the bishop said he wanted their opinion.

Mr. Maxforth now took up the second letter from the breakfast-table. The hand-writing upon the envelope was strange to him, as was also the coat-of-arms upon the seal. He turned it over and over—saw that it bore the post mark of "Durham"—

and idly wondered who the sender could be. He did not suppose the contents were of any very great importance to himself, and his amazement, perplexity, and satisfaction were considerable when, having broken the seal, he read the following communication :—

"Thorn Park, Durham,

"December 5th, 187—.

"My Dear Sir,

"The Reverend Dr. Fabian, who held the living of Hurdale, is now deceased, and as the Patron of the living, I have the sincere pleasure of offering it for your acceptance. I have reason to believe that your views, both in regard to the forms and ceremonies of our Church, and also in point of doctrine, correspond with the opinions held by the congregation. This is one reason why I offer you the benefice, for I hold that no patron should place a clergyman over a people, where there is decided incompatibility between the parties. Although personally a stranger to you, I

have had the pleasure of hearing you preach, as I happened to be in Scamborough, and to attend St. Jude's, on the occasion when you took duty there, nearly a year ago.

"I may add that the value of the living of Hurdale is one thousand pounds per annum nett, and that the population of the parish is about nine thousand. There are two other churches in the town of Hurdale, each having a population of four thousand, and both livings are in the gift of the vicar of the parent parish. I trust you will feel it your duty to accept the benefice, and if you come I pray that God's blessing may rest upon your labours.

"Lady Bellington and myself hope you will come and spend a few days at Thorn Park as soon as you can find it convenient to do so. You can then look over the parish, and we can talk over the details, which I trust will induce you to come among us.

"With kindest regards believe me,

"My dear Sir,

"Yours very faithfully,

"HENRY BELLINGTON."

"A most remarkable letter truly!" thought the Rector, and his face beamed with delight as he read it over and over again, endeavouring to take in the ideas that Sir Henry's handsome and unexpected offer suggested. It was so entirely unforeseen, and so truly gratifying! The Rector could eat no breakfast, but went pacing up and down the room in a great state of excitement; but by-and-by he began to think over the matter more calmly. Of course he could not accept this living until he had been to look at the place. He must take everything into consideration, and he must consult with his friends. He was not a man who cared for change for its own sake; and he was quite contented and comfortable with his present parishioners and his present work. Of course the increase of income must be taken into account, and the improved position. In the course of the day he shewed Sir Henry's letter to his two churchwardens, and these worthy men, while congratulating him with much heartiness, said they hoped he would

not go. "Oxbury could not spare him," they declared. Mr. Maxforth laughed, but shook his head, and replied that he must not commit himself at present. Then they had a long talk, the issue of which was that the Rector decided to run down to Kemborough and consult Mr. Callinan. The rural dean and himself had long been intimate friends, and as it happened that the former had once lived in the neighbourhood of Hurdale, and was also a man possessed of large experience and sound judgment, he could scarcely have a better counsellor.

First of all, however, he wrote to thank Sir Henry Bellington very heartily for his most kind and generous offer, and to name a time when, if convenient to the baronet, he would pay his visit to Thorn Park. This the Rector did at once, and in about two hours after posting the letter he was closeted with Mr. Callinan, and earnestly discussing with him the unexpected turn his affairs had taken.

"You are a fortunate man," said the

rural dean, "and I congratulate you very sincerely, Maxforth ; but it is so many years since I was at Hurdale that I cannot tell you what the place is like now. Of course you will run down and see for yourself before you decide ?"

The Rector said, yes, he would.

"You may have to make a very considerable outlay in repairs if you take it—a few thousand pounds perhaps ; one never knows what expense he may be put to when he enters upon a new living," said Mr. Callinan with a sigh. He was an elderly, bald-headed gentleman, whose cheeks were very much sunken, and who had a careworn and depressed look.

"Surely not so large a sum as that ?" exclaimed Mr. Maxforth, in a tone of alarm.

"It is quite possible," returned the Rural Dean, sadly. "I will tell you how it was in my own case. When I was a young man I was presented with a small living. The income was about two hundred a year. I *was compelled* by the law to put the

Vicarage in thorough repair, and towards meeting the expense I was allowed forty pounds. *It cost me six hundred.*"

"That was a great hardship," said the Rector.

"Take another case," continued Mr. Callinan. "I was fortunate enough to be presented with a somewhat better living a few years afterwards. The former incumbent, however, had left certain farm buildings in the parish in a state of dilapidation, and *I had to rebuild them entirely.* Had I not been enabled to borrow the money on advantageous terms, the expense would have nearly ruined me."

"I suppose," remarked Mr. Maxforth, "that in cases of that kind the 'Queen Anne's Bounty' Board lend the money, do they not?"

"Yes," returned the Rural Dean, with another sigh; "*sometimes* they will, but the conditions they impose upon the poor borrower are often very hard, and the proceedings of the board are at times exceedingly arbitrary."

"So I have heard," said the Rector.

"I have often thought," observed Mr. Callinan, "that if the members of that board were elected by the clergy instead of being appointed as they are at present, we should have more justice done to us."

"And the plan would be more in harmony with the spirit of the age, certainly," responded Mr. Maxforth.

"Then again," said the Rural Dean, "these surveyors who are sent to inspect our vicarages—see how arbitrary and capricious and even tyrannical they are! And we are utterly in the power of these men. They issue their order to us to pull down and to build up, at their discretion."

"It is very unjust!" cried the Rector.

"The clergy," said Mr. Callinan, "ought to have a voice in the election of these surveyors, who would then be less despotic and peremptory, and more disposed to listen to reason in the matter of dilapidations."

This is one of the subjects you are going to discuss at the meeting to which you have summoned us, I perceive," said Mr. Maxforth, rising. "I regret that I shall not be able to be present. I expect to be at Thorn Park on that day."

"Certainly," responded the Rural Dean. "Well, Maxforth, I am sincerely glad of your good fortune, and I trust you will have God's blessing in all your future labours."

A few days afterwards the Rector paid his visit to Thorn Park, and was conducted over the church and parish of Hurdale by Sir Henry Bellington. A few calls were also made upon the leading parishioners. The result was entirely satisfactory, and when the visit came to an end, Mr. Maxforth formally accepted the living, and returned to Oxbury to make arrangements for entering upon his new cure.

The first thing he did was to send for Mr. Peake, the curate. This young man had been with him for three years, had won his esteem and that of the parishioners,

and was, he knew, in every way deserving of preferment.

"Sit down, Peake," said he when the curate entered his study in some trepidation. "I have some good news for you, reverend sir," he added, laughing and pushing the other by the shoulders into a chair, "some capital news for you, my friend."

"Good news is always welcome," remarked agitated Mr. Peake, turning red as a turkey-cock's comb while his heart beat loudly in that broad chest of his.

"Well, Peake, I have decided to go to Hurdale."

"Oh, indeed," returned the curate, looking at him intently, and waiting to hear more.

"I like Hurdale very much," said Mr. Maxforth, "and I have accepted the living all the more readily, Peake, because I think I have found a man who, if he will consent to succeed me here at Oxbury, will be entirely acceptable to the people, and be likely to do more good in this parish than the present unworthy Rector has ever accomplished."

Mr. Peake bent his head and listened in silence.

"If you will accept this living, Peake," said the Rector, "it is heartily at your service. You have proved yourself worthy of far better preferment, but such as it is, I hope you will take it. I have long known that there is a fair girl in Manchester," he continued, smiling, "to whom you have been engaged for some years, and that you have waited for a benefice as an essential preliminary to marriage. I am glad to be able to put you in such a position, that you can be united to her without further delay."

The curate thankfully accepted the kind offer, and when the arrangement thus made became known in Oxbury, it gave general satisfaction. By this time everybody was talking of Mr. Maxforth's approaching departure from the town, and subscriptions for the inevitable "testimonial" had already begun to be paid to the churchwardens. The "testimonial" was to be a grand affair, and was to be presented at a banquet to be

held in Oxbury Town Hall on New Year's Day.

The Rector, in the meantime, thought that the time had now come for making another appeal to Violet. His heart was bound up in the girl who had rejected him, and he had never ceased to hope that she might, after all, one day be his wife. He believed she loved him in spite of the rebuff he had received. The unexpected turn his affairs had taken had surely removed the chief hindrance to their union. He would pay another visit to Seftwick; but first he would send her a few lines, repeating his offer, and beseeching her to let his altered circumstances have their due weight. He sat down and wrote as follows:

"Oxbury Rectory,
"December 19th, 187—.

"DEAR VIOLET,

"I shall in a few days, God willing, again present myself at your cottage on Seftwick Green; my object the same as

when I came to see you eleven long months ago. I asked you then, darling, to be my wife, and you told me it was impossible, for the simple reason that your sister had married the dissenting minister in my parish. You urged me to think of my position; to reflect that if we were united, my work among my parishioners would be seriously hindered. You pointed out the embarrassment and pain it would cause your sister, and that it would greatly increase her husband's difficulties—already sufficiently formidable. You reminded me that Mr. Holland's people suspected him of leaning towards the Church of England, and you believed our marriage would, by confirming their suspicion, embitter their feelings still more against him, and thus the purpose he had formed of living down their hostility and winning them over to him, would be frustrated. By these arguments, dearest, you fortified yourself against my proposal, and I was constrained to leave your beloved presence hopeless and despairing.

"But, now, I am leaving Oxbury. The living of Hurdale has been offered me, and I have accepted it. You know the place probably, for it is not far from Seftwick. Surely *now*, dear Violet, not one of your objections will hold good. You may marry me now, if you will, without doing any injury to your sister or to Mr. Holland; and when I come I shall ask you to fix the wedding-day as soon as possible after I am Vicar of Hurdale. You, darling, are my first and only love, and without you, as mistress of my heart and home, no worldly success can bring me any satisfaction.

"I hope to be in Seftwick on Tuesday next, when I will explain and describe everything. Oh! may God bless you, and may He give me good success when I come.

"Believe me,

"Ever yours affectionately,

"CLEMENT MAXFORTH."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

Poor Mr. Holland was discharging his various duties at Grange Street in fear and trembling. His opponents had not disturbed him of late, but he was living in continual dread of some new outbreak of hostilities. The frequency with which the storms had burst upon him in the past had made him distrustful when a lull took place, and he spent each interval in a state of nervous apprehension of even worse evils than those that had already befallen him. He could not tell from what quarter, or on what pretext, he might be assailed. Perhaps offence might be taken at some remark uttered from the pulpit, or at one

of the business meetings, or when visiting at the homes of his flock. His people might not approve of the management of his domestic affairs at the chapel-house. It was possible that a deputation might wait upon him for the purpose of stating that Mrs. Holland's maid-servant was not a suitable person to have in the house, and that he must discharge her, since "she had been seen to enter the parish church instead of coming to Grange Street," on one particular Sunday evening. The minister knew that he had once given her permission to accompany a friend to the former place of worship, and he had been uneasy in his mind ever since, because it might be considered by some a conclusive sign of Church of England proclivities on his part.

Or, again, perhaps the members of his community might fall out amongst themselves, and wish to bring their disputes before the business meetings. It had been so difficult to keep the peace at these monthly gatherings, and so much mischief had been

wrought on those occasions, that he was becoming more convinced every day of the folly of holding them. But then, they were a necessary part of the Dissenting system. Mr. Flint would be horrified were he to hint that they ought to be abolished or held less frequently. They were "an institution" that must be upheld at all costs. Yet the minister never attended one of these conclaves without feelings of uneasiness and terror.

It may be said that Mr. Holland ought to have been able to keep these unruly elements insubjection; and the inference may be drawn that he possessed little or no tact, and that his presence or his opinions carried no moral weight with them. The young man himself sometimes feared that this was the true explanation of the difficulty. The fault was in himself, not in the system. And had his been a solitary case, and his experience altogether unique, he would have been entirely convinced of this. But unfortunately he knew of many societies and many pastors with a similar history.

Some of those pastors, too, were immeasurably superior to himself in every way. Their private lives were without flaw; they possessed sound judgment, and shining pulpit talents, and were acknowledged to be "good men." Yet they were not happy with their people; nay, they were broken-hearted by reason of the petty, intolerant, and tyrannous spirit which the popular vote, and the power they possessed over their spiritual teachers, produced and strengthened among their respective congregations. Mr. Holland well knew that no charge whatever had been made, or was likely to be made, touching his own moral character. *That* his bitterest opponents admitted to be unimpeachable. But still he had been inexperienced, slow, and self-distrustful, in matters relating to the administration of the church, and had made several mistakes which have been described in this history: whereas some pastors, equally unfortunate and uncomfortable, had avoided these errors of judgment, and consequently had given less

occasion for fault-finding. The poor minister therefore concluded that the sect to which he belonged was not so perfect as he had once thought it, and that he must look for trouble and contention for the rest of his natural life.

How different, he thought, was the lot of that fortunate man, the Rector of Oxbury, between whom and the parishioners there had been unbroken harmony from the first! What sunny memories Mr. Maxforth would take with him when the time came to bid farewell to his people, and enter upon his new cure! Ah, well. It was no use repining. He must bow his neck to the yoke; and should more heavy strokes fall upon him, he must receive them as patiently as he was able!

Mr. Holland had had no communication with the Rector, and had not even seen him for several months. He knew that the latter was about to leave for Hurdale, because all the town was talking about it, and the place was all astir with preparations

for the banquet in the Town Hall, and for the presentation of the testimonial. But Violet and her mother had preserved their secret most carefully, and so had Mr. Maxforth ; and although Copperfox and Amos Flint were watching and waiting for an opportunity to speak to the minister about their suspicions, they had not done so as yet, nor did the inmates of the chapel-house dream of their intention. Amos Flint had not yet heard from his cousin at Eskham, but was eagerly expecting a letter every day. Until that communication should arrive he and his friend thought it best not to acquaint the church members with their plans, because they wished to prepare a great surprise for the society and to overwhelm Mr. Holland with the revelation. Even Mr. Flint, the deacon, had not been admitted to their counsels. They were not sure that they could trust him. He might disapprove of their purpose, nay, he might even betray them. It was impossible to predict with confidence what course he might take. The con-

spirators, therefore, carried on their operations in the strictest secrecy.

Now if Mr. Flint was distrusted by his cousin and by Copperfox, he was even more unfortunate in regard to the minister, and the party who supported him, since these latter regarded the deacon with less favour still. Mr. Flint was endeavouring to please both parties, and of course he satisfied neither. He still had a hankering after his old associates, and bitterly regretted their absence from Grange Street and its business meetings. As we have seen, he was making desperate attempts to place some of them in office. At the same time, he did not wish, if he could avoid it, to give Mr. Holland any just cause of complaint. He saw that the minister's party was just now in the ascendant, and therefore desired to be on good terms with him.

Larberry had proposed to the minister that a little supper should be given to the choir on New Year's Eve, to be followed by a service in the chapel. How would

the austere deacon regard this proposal? Mr. Holland ventured one day to sound him upon the subject.

"We all wish that you should be of the party," he said to Mr. Flint, "and that you should speak a few words. You will come, won't you?"

"I would rather not."

"Why?"

"You will get on better without me," returned the deacon, who was considering what his old associates would think of him, if he were to consent. All the same he had a desire to be present.

"We shall not, I am sure," said the minister. "Do come."

"I will consider about it."

This was the utmost concession he would be induced to make.

A few days afterwards the preparations for New Year's Eve began in real earnest. Invitations to the supper were issued by the minister to all the members of the choir and other friends, and joints of beef and mutton, besides ham, tongues, and

various other provisions were at once ordered—the expense being divided between Mr. Holland and Larberry; and when the last day of the old year came, the schoolroom was decorated with evergreens by Kate, to whom that day was a laborious but a very happy one. Everything was in readiness by seven o'clock, when the company began to drop in by twos and threes. Dame Crock and her husband were among the first to arrive, and after them came Garrel and Mr. Sedlock, bringing with them the editor of the *Oxbury Weekly Post*, whom Larberry had invited with a view of securing a favourable notice of the event in the pages of that journal. Then appeared five or six members of the choir with other friends, all looking fresh and jubilant. In a few minutes more the company was complete, and after grace the business of eating and drinking began. Supper over they adjourned to the chapel, where, to the accompaniment of the new harmonium, the good folks continued singing their hymns

and anthems until nearly eleven o'clock. On the previous Sunday Philip had announced from his pulpit that there would be a midnight service on this occasion, and had invited all to come. A little before eleven o'clock, therefore, the supper-party ceased from their singing and talking, and settled themselves in perfect silence in the dismal pews. Presently Mr. Flint came gliding into the chapel, and seated himself near one of the doors. In a few minutes a large number of persons had assembled. The service, which was very solemn and impressive, and in which Mr. Holland, Mr. Flint, Roger Garrel, Mr. Crock and Larberry took part, need not be particularly described. It was brought to a close one minute after midnight. To the minister's great regret a disturbing element had been introduced into the meeting, which had marred his enjoyment of it, and had also undoubtedly diminished the good effect the service had been intended to produce. Larberry, when praying for the prosperity of Grange Street, had inadvertently made

a remark which gave great offence to Mr. Flint. The former was habitually incautious in his expressions, and, with the best intention, on this occasion he had prayed that the deacon's heart might be with the pastor and with his people, and that *if his sympathies were not with the cause at Grange Street*, the Lord would make them to be so. When Mr. Flint afterwards came upon the platform and delivered his address, he seized upon this unguarded expression of Larberry's, and commented upon it with so much severity that the harmony and devotional feeling of the assembly were seriously disturbed, and a sense of disappointment pervaded the minds of all, when at length they were dismissed with the benediction. Nor did this unpleasant state of things end here. Larberry, who felt very much hurt by what the deacon had said, was putting on his overcoat, and was about to leave the chapel, when Mr. Flint came up, and after hovering about the pew for some time, said to him:

"I wish you had not said what you did just now about me, Mr. Larberry."

"And I wish you had not taken it in the spirit you did," replied the other quickly. "I meant no harm, and you needn't have been so ready to take offence."

Mr. Flint was still hovering about the pew, pallid, argumentative, and deprecatory.

"I couldn't let such a charge as that you made against me, go unchallenged," said he. "I was bound to notice it."

"I beg your pardon," was Larberry's rejoinder, "I made no charge against you; I put the matter hypothetically; it was a supposition; and it is a pity if a man's prayer is to be criticised and pulled to pieces as mine was, because I said I hoped your heart would be with our pastor and with his people."

"But, Mr. Larberry," said the deacon, "you put it as if the matter was open to doubt. I was surprised at that. You know that I am the friend of this cause; you know that I am labouring for it continually."

"You work hard enough, it is true," assented Larberry, "but I don't think you show much sympathy with us, for all that. When we were all wanting the harmonium, for instance, you did not show much sympathy with us then; you gave us no encouragement, and even tried to throw cold water upon the affair; when we asked your advice as to where we should place it, you put all kinds of obstacles in our way, and when you were invited to come to our supper to-night, you refused. Meanwhile," continued Larberry, who was now getting excited, "meanwhile it is pretty generally reported that you are hand and glove with certain parties who have done, and are doing, great injury to this place, and I tell you plainly, Mr. Flint, that your position of neutrality is open to the charge of double-dealing."

The fiery speaker, with these words, moved down the aisle, and seemed desirous of shaking off his interlocutor. By this time the chapel was quite empty, save these two men, and also the pew-opener,

who was moving silently about, turning off the gas, in various parts of the building. The deacon followed Larberry down the aisle and past the porch, and they both stood in the open air, under the midnight sky. They had been speaking in a suppressed tone—almost a whisper, indeed, so that no one had overheard them. They now stood for a moment or two among the grave-stones. The bells from the church-tower were loudly ringing in the New Year. Not a single human being was to be seen besides themselves. Neither of them spoke as they stood, but each looked at the other—the countenance of the one rigid and austere, that of the other working with half-suppressed indignation. After a pause Mr. Flint asked coldly :

"What have I done to merit this hard language ?"

At this question Larberry turned away, and without replying, moved rapidly towards home. The deacon, however, would not be shaken off, and striding beside him, again asked what he had done ?

"I will tell you what you have done," said Larberry, with much energy; "you have acted disgracefully from first to last;" and his tongue being now loosened, the hot-headed ironmonger continued to speak in the same strain for a considerable time. By degrees his wrath subsided, and with a calmer manner he adopted a tone of expostulation and entreaty. Thus the conversation ended just as the church-bells ceased; and wishing each other "a happy New Year," the two men shook hands, and went their several ways in the midnight silence.

CHAPTER IX.

AMOS FLINT'S INTENTION.

Mrs. Holland was astounded, on New Years' Day, by a letter from Violet, stating that the Rector of Oxbury had asked her to be his wife, that she had consented, and that their wedding was to take place in September. No news could have been more unexpected than this, and none could have afforded the minister's wife more satisfaction and pride. She showed the letter to her husband, and they talked over the subject with the greatest eagerness and delight.

"We are to go to the wedding you see, dear," said Kate. "What a treat it will be after all our trials in this dreadful place."

"Yes," returned the minister, with a quiet smile, "and it will be pleasant to congratulate Violet upon her ability to keep a secret."

"Well, we know why they kept it from us," said his wife. "It was for our good."

"Undoubtedly," he replied; "and now we in our turn must as carefully keep the matter from our people or mischief will come of it."

"Do you think so?"

"Most assuredly. By 'our people' I mean in this instance our old friends Copperfox and Amos Flint and others of their type. If it reaches their ears I will not answer for the consequences."

"But aren't they likely to hear about it from other sources?"

"I think not. The Rector will not breathe a syllable to any soul in this place, you may be quite sure."

"When will he leave Oxbury?"

"In about four weeks I believe," replied her husband.

A letter came to the chapel-house that afternoon from Mr. Maxforth, addressed to the Rev. Philip Holland. The writer frankly stated that he had loved Miss Vaveley from the day he had met her in that house, and recounted the various steps he had taken to win her consent to their union. He acknowledged that he had ever desired a closer intimacy with Mr. Holland, and had wished to open his heart to him, but that he had been withheld by the fear of exciting bitterness and jealousy among his people. He hoped to have the pleasure of calling to say good-bye, and also of meeting him and Mrs. Holland at Seftwick in September, on the occasion of his marriage.

"How wonderfully it has all come about," cried Kate, looking over her husband's shoulder as he read. "Who would have thought that the Rector of the parish would ever marry your wife's sister!"

After a while Mr. Holland retired to his study, taking with him another letter that

had arrived by the same post. It was a letter requesting the formal dismission of Mr. Copperfox, Mr. Clatts, and Mr. McGowan, and about four other persons to the society at Peebles' Lane. It was signed "John Gedger," which the minister concluded to be the name of the young man who had recently been preaching to Mr. Gloss's infant community. That some young divine or other had been there "on approbation" for some weeks past was well known at Grange Street, and it was also rumoured that he had "met with acceptance," as the phrase is, and was likely to be elected pastor as soon as the new church was fully organised. However that might be, his letter received immediate attention at the hands of Mr. Holland, who at once prepared the required form of dismission, which he submitted at the next church meeting for his people's adoption. Their assent having been obtained, it was despatched to Mr. Gedger without delay; and thus, to the great relief of all who wished for tranquillity and

progress at Grange Street, some of the more turbulent opponents of the minister ceased to belong to that society. Mr. Holland supposed he had now done with them for ever, but he soon discovered his mistake, as we shall see hereafter. They were not disposed to be shaken off so easily.

A word or two respecting Peeble's Lane. The community there, since the recent dismission from Grange Street, numbered exactly fourteen persons. These individuals, with such strangers and "well-wishers" as occasionally looked in, were accustomed to meet in a small building dignified by the appellation of Peeble's Lane Chapel. The chapel was not yet paid for, but they hoped it shortly would be; and further, they proposed to erect in a short time, on credit, a much larger one—a structure, in fact, which no Dissenter, however respectable, need be ashamed to worship in. It will be easily understood that, to an aspiring community of this kind, a man of substance like Copperfox was a

great acquisition. They petted him, and made him their treasurer. He, in his turn, made them a present of a small piece of land, on certain conditions, and lent them a sum of money besides.

In the meantime, Mr. Gedger had been elected to be their pastor. The election was not an unanimous one, for the young preacher did not quite come up to Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox's standard of excellence; nevertheless, he was supposed to have a fair prospect of success with his people. It is true, they considered him capable of improvement in one or two respects, and were unwilling to let him walk alone. They also watched his errant footsteps with laudable anxiety, and truly affectionate alarm. A little judicious training, however, would suffice to make him all they could desire, and they believed he would prove exceedingly useful in raising money for the large chapel that was contemplated.

While Peeble's Lane was thus struggling for existence, Grange Street was basking in the sunshine of prosperity. Only one thing

seemed to be needed, and that was, that the remainder of the malcontents should follow the example of Copperfox and his friends, and get themselves dismissed as soon as possible. The names of Amos Flint, Snooley, Mrs. Todd and her two daughters, Staggers, and Mrs. Copperfox (who was not dismissed with her husband), still remained upon the church-book—much to the disgust of a large number of persons—and it was felt that until *they* were disposed of the dignity and self-respect of the mother-church would not be properly vindicated, nor her wrongs sufficiently avenged. Their time, however, had not yet come, and in the meanwhile there were other matters, of a far more agreeable nature, to task the energy and enterprise of the minister's supporters.

Grange Street had long been famous for its tea-meetings. These had dwindled and languished since the troublous times had come upon her, but now the most vigorous and united efforts were being made to revive them in all their pristine splendour.

Intense was the chagrin of Mr. Staggers, on walking out one fine morning, to discover that Oxbury was studded and besprinkled with handbills and posters, announcing a tea-meeting at the old chapel, and mentioning the names of several ministers of the neighbourhood who had promised to be present and deliver addresses. Mr. Staggers, who sometimes made assertions recklessly, and who perhaps wished to keep people away from the meeting, if possible, asserted his disbelief in the reality of these promises, and hazarded the prediction that the ministerial talent would not be forthcoming on the occasion. Those who were in the secret laughed at the prophecy, taking care, meanwhile, to redouble their exertions, in order to ensure a complete success in every department of their undertaking. Foremost among these workers was Larberry. Knowing that there were persons who spoke of the unction of former tea-meetings with rapturous admiration, and a sigh of regret for their departed glories, our friend had registered a secret

vow that this coming event should totally eclipse and "bang"—to use his own expression—all former festivals. Nor was he sparing of his labours to carry his purpose into effect.

And when the long-expected day arrived, the result amply rewarded all his endeavours. So large was the company that crowded into the schoolroom, that, to his great delight, he was not able to find space for himself at any of the tea-tables, and was fain to squeeze himself into a corner and surreptitiously imbibe his tea out of a slop-basin. To hear the clatter of cups and saucers, to feel himself almost stifled by the heat of the room and the crushing of the crowd, to behold the members of the committee pushing their way hither and thither with plates of cake and bread and butter, to listen to the laughing and talking—all this filled the soul of Larberry with joy. To increase his satisfaction, there was Mr. Flint himself—who, he had reason to believe, had profited by the counsel he had given him on the

"watch-night"—there was Mr. Flint himself, carrying urns about over the heads of the people, and positively looking happy! And, if that was not enough, Mr. Staggers' prediction was already falsified by the appearance, *even at the tea-table,* of that array of friendly ministers whose names had been given upon the bills and posters. Well might Larberry feel it to be the happiest day of his life. And, when the tea was over, and the company, having adjourned to the chapel, received fresh accessions from Oxbury and adjacent villages, Larberry seemed raised to the seventh heaven. To see the pews so well filled, the minister so well supported upon the platform, and everybody's countenance so animated, was more than a sufficient recompense for all his toils and troubles. When the speakers congratulated Mr. Holland upon the success of the gathering, and spoke of his "captivity" as being "turned;" when they openly and freely condemned those who had "left the ark of the testimony," and who were "wandering

hither and thither," how fervently Larberry expressed his assent and approbation! When they became facetious, how heartily he laughed at their jokes! And when at length the meeting came to an end, how triumphantly did he challenge any one to mention any previous festival at Grange Street that surpassed or even equalled *this!*

Thus the great day had come and gone: thus also came and went some other days and weeks besides; the cause at Grange Street becoming more consolidated, and the disaffected going further and further astray, and more dissatisfied with themselves and every one else. In fact, these last were having a very bad time of it indeed. They were worse off than Copperfox and his friends, for the latter had a home at Peeble's Lane, whereas Amos Flint, the Todds, and the others whose names were still on the church-book at Grange Street, might be said to be adrift altogether. Moreover, if they turned into the Methodist Chapel, as they occasionally did, they were not always

comfortable. At the Calvinistic Meeting-house, again, the preacher would sometimes give them great offence, and on leaving they would feel disinclined to revisit it. There were other places of worship, but some grave objection lay in their minds against each of them. No wonder, then, if some of these wandering sheep now began to wish they had never strayed from the fold. We must not suppose, however, that they all intended to return to it. Most of them were too proud, too obstinate, and too much ashamed of the past to do *that*. But there were others with less spirit, and perhaps a little more selfishness and cunning, who thought they would no longer rebel against fate, so to speak, but would bow to what was inevitable. How foolish they had been! they would go back, *and bide their time*. In doing so, they would have to submit, they thought, to some humiliation, but they could scarcely be more miserable than they were already. Accordingly, they now re-appeared at the old chapel, sitting, not in their accustomed

places, but in some pew near the door; for not only were they desirous to escape notice as much as possible, but they also discovered that the pews they had voluntarily relinquished some months previously were now taken and occupied by others—most of them strangers who had settled at Grange Street during their absence. The wanderers, however, had been so humbled by their recent troubles, that they made no complaint, nor did they openly resent the look of distrust and suspicion with which they were regarded by some of the people, who probably feared that the unity and peace of the mother-church were about to be again disturbed.

There was one of those who now reappeared at Grange Street who was the subject of a good deal of conversation at this time—and that was Amos Flint. This young man, unlike many of his friends, walked boldly up the aisle to his old pew, and to the amazement of everybody, he brought Mary Gray with him!

"They say she is going to marry him,"

was Mrs. Larberry's exclamation, addressed to the minister's wife that evening after the close of the service.

"Yes," replied Kate, "I hear it is settled so; and I hope they will be happy together."

"Well," murmured Mrs. Larberry, "all I can say is, I am very sorry for that young farmer. He was very fond of her, and is terribly cut up about it. I liked him more than I do Amos. He had not so much to say for himself, perhaps, but he would have made her a good husband, if she had taken him, for all that."

"I think Amos will be a good husband to her," said the minister's wife gently.

"He ought to be," replied Mrs. Larberry, "for a nicer girl never stepped than she is. There is one thing—she will do him good, I believe, and lead his mind to better things. She never did agree with his views about Mr. Holland, and it is through her that he has come back to Grange Street, they say."

"I admire her good sense," said Kate, laughing.

"So do I," said Mrs. Larberry. "She

will keep him straight, depend upon it. Do you know where they are going to be married?"

"No, indeed I do not," replied the minister's wife.

"Nor do I, but I have heard Amos is going to call upon Mr. Holland."

"Is he?" asked Kate, with some surprise.

"Yes, and he won't be many days before he calls, either, for they are to be married in two or three weeks—at least, that is what I have been told."

When Mrs. Larberry had gone, the minister's wife mused much upon what she had heard. She felt certain that Amos Flint would never ask her husband to marry him. What, then, could be the object of this call he was going to make? When she mentioned the matter, as she did that same evening, to the minister, they talked about it for some time, and both of them agreed that Amos must have some scheme or other arranged in his own mind, which he would propound when this visit of his came to be paid.

CHAPTER X.

AMOS FLINT ASKS A FAVOUR.

The deacon's cousin received at this time the long-expected letter from Mr. Shotton, of Eskham, in answer to the one Amos had sent some weeks previously, asking for information relative to Miss Vaveley and the Rector. The contents, however, were terribly unsatisfactory, and Amos actually tore his hair with vexation. The writer stated that he had been suffering for two or three months from a severe illness, which had not only prevented him from paying his accustomed visits to Seftwick, but had confined him to his bed, and even incapacitated him from writing until now. He was then convalescent, and hoped to be

able to resume business in a short time; still it would probably be a month or two before his own affairs took him to Seftwick. The sea was so rough that it was impossible to cross the bay, and the journey round by rail was a tedious one. He greatly regretted that he was unable to send any information. As soon as the state of his health permitted he would give immediate attention to the matter mentioned, and would make the most diligent inquiries.

And this, thought Amos, is the barren result of all my patient waiting! Mr. Copperfox and I were foolish not to have gone to Seftwick ourselves! But then, when the young man reflected upon difficulties of that course, and the distance—nearly three hundred miles—to the scene of action, and also considered how much ridicule and contempt would be heaped upon him if, after prosecuting the inquiry in his own person, he should prove to have been mistaken in his suspicions, he concluded that he had no safe alternative but to continue passive and expectant.

His difficulties at Oxbury were greater now than ever, for it was no longer possible to cross-examine the Rector, or to watch his actions. Mr. Maxforth, having paid his farewell visit to the chapel-house, where he had spent the evening in the company of the minister and his wife, pleasantly discussing the strange events that had befallen them all, and that were about to connect them together so closely—Mr. Maxforth had finally left the town and had settled at Hurdale. The only man in Oxbury from whom information was likely to be obtained was Mr. Holland. It was high time, Amos thought, to carry out the purpose Mr. Copperfox and himself had formed of questioning the minister upon the subject.

Now Mrs. Larberry had been correctly informed when she told Kate that the deacon's cousin was about to be married. Amos had indeed prevailed upon Mary Gray to consent to be his wife, and the day was fixed, on the understanding that the ceremony should take place at Grange Street. The young man had now to obtain

an interview with Mr. Holland touching this important matter. It occurred to him that if he rightly used his opportunity, some light might be thrown upon the Rector's matrimonial proceedings. He betook himself, therefore, the next day to the chapel-house, with this two-fold object in view. When the maid-servant answered his knock at the door she told him the minister was in the garden at the back of the house, and being shown into the empty sitting-room he sat down.

Looking eagerly round, his eye lighted upon an open letter that had been carelessly thrown upon the table after being read. He took it up quickly and ran his eye over the pages. It was from Violet. His excitement, and fear of being interrupted, and caught in the act, prevented his fully taking in its contents, but he gathered that preparations had begun at Seftwick for a wedding; that the fair writer had a lover whom she adored; and that Kate was to make up her mind to enjoy herself very much when she came over to take her part on the happy occasion.

The minister meanwhile was complacently pottering about his garden in the bright spring sunshine, and contemplating the crocuses and snowdrops. His wife was pointing out to him one early flower after another just peeping above the ground, when the maid came to them and said a gentleman was in the house wanting to see "the master."

"What is his name?" asked Kate.

"Mr. Amos Flint, ma'am," replied the girl, and so went back to her work.

Mr. Holland's pulse quickened a little at the mention of the name, and at the prospect of an interview with his quondam antagonist—an interview, too, upon such a delicate subject as the one which he supposed had brought Amos to his house. Kate also felt the colour rise to her cheeks, but her eyes brightened as she said to her husband:

"I think he will ask you to marry him."

"Perhaps so," he answered dubiously, and then, leaving his wife in the garden,

he went into the house. On entering the sitting-room, he found his visitor seated there in expectation of his coming.

"Good-morning, Mr. Flint," said the minister, closing the door after him, and placing a chair near the fire.

"Good-morning, sir," said Amos, taking the proffered seat, and holding his hat between his knees. "I hope you are quite well."

"Quite well, thank you," replied Mr. Holland, who had seated himself in a neighbouring chair; and, crossing his legs, was endeavouring to feel comfortable.

"And I hope Mrs. Holland is quite well," said Amos, trembling.

"Tolerably well, thank you."

Then there was an awkward silence, which was broken by Mr. Holland, who, wishing to give his visitor fair play, and perceiving that he did not seem likely to come to the point at the outset, discoursed upon the weather and other indifferent topics, and so drew him out by degrees. Still, Amos was evidently unprepared, at

present, to broach the topic which had brought him to the chapel-house, and therefore hazarded an observation upon the present position of affairs at Grange Street.

"There was a good congregation at the chapel last Sunday, sir," said he.

"Yes," replied the minister; "very good. Our numbers are now increasing rapidly, I think."

"I am very glad of it, sir; and I was also pleased to find that the singing had so much improved. It used to be very poor; but it is a treat to hear it now; every one sings with so much judgment and spirit."

"We owe that in great measure to the harmonium, don't you think?" asked Mr. Holland, smiling.

"Very likely, sir; it is a powerful instrument, and is played with skill. The people are encouraged to follow its lead. I hear it is already paid for."

"It is," said the minister. "Our friends Larberry and Garrel have been indefa-

tigable, and have obtained subscriptions from almost everybody in the town. In fact, people belonging to all the other bodies have taken great interest in the movement."

Then there was another pause, during which Amos looked hard on the floor, and grasped his hat nervously between his knees.

"I have come, sir," he said at length, "not to talk about these matters, but to speak upon a subject of a more personal nature. I want to know if you will grant me a great favour."

"What is that?" asked Mr. Holland. "I will do what I can for you, if it is reasonable."

"Well, sir; I hope it is a reasonable request I am about to make," said Amos, jerking his head round, and glancing furtively at his interlocutor, "otherwise I would not have come here to make it."

"Then you may depend upon it, it will not be refused," said the minister, laughing.

"Well, sir," said Amos Flint; "the fact is, I am about to commit matrimony."

"I congratulate you," said Mr. Holland.

"And I want to be married in Grange Street chapel," continued the visitor.

"A very natural wish indeed," remarked Mr. Holland.

"But"—proceeded Amos Flint, looking hard at his hat, and inwardly enjoying the prospect of discomfiting the pastor by what he was about to say—"I want *another minister* to perform the ceremony."

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Holland, with a look of disappointment which he could not conceal.

"Yes, sir; and I want to know if you will grant us the use of the chapel for the occasion."

"What is the name of the minister you refer to?"

"Oh! he is an acquaintance of mine living in London—a Mr. Smith. You don't know him, I dare say."

"No," said Mr. Holland; "I have'nt

that pleasure." He then thought the matter over for a second or two, and added, "If you will come again in a day or two, Mr. Flint, I will give you my answer; but I tell you frankly, I do not think I ought to accede to your wish."

"Don't you?"

"No. The circumstances are peculiar, you see; nor do I think you have given me a sufficient reason. My present feeling is this: if you are married in Grange Street chapel, I must perform the ceremony. But still, as I said before, this is not my final answer."

"It is very unfriendly of you," said Amos Flint, with an insolent stare; "it is *very unfriendly* of you to feel disinclined to grant my request."

"I do not think the epithet 'unfriendly' is a proper one, Mr. Flint," said the minister quietly.

"Well," said the visitor, "I must say I did not expect you to refuse me this favour."

"I am afraid I shall be obliged to do so," said Mr. Holland.

"Look here," suggested Amos, by way of compromise; "you might assist Mr. Smith at the ceremony, if you like. There would be no objection to that."

"I must decline that honour," replied the minister, rising. "There are other places of worship you can be married in, if you object to my being the officiating minister."

"I don't want to go elsewhere," said the visitor.

"Then I have told you my condition," was Mr. Holland's rejoinder. "If you like to come again I will think it over, but I fancy I shall not alter my mind."

"Very well, sir," said Amos Flint, and the next minute he was gone. He left the house with far more respect for the minister than he had ever felt before, and the next day the latter received a polite note from him, saying he should feel greatly obliged if Mr. Holland would kindly consent to officiate. This missive was a great relief to the mind of Kate, who had been much disquieted when her husband told her

what he had said to his visitor. "I almost think I would let him have his way," had been her advice, given hesitatingly it is true, but with some fear and trembling, nevertheless, for she had become so impressed by Amos Flint's stealthy methods of gaining his ends, that in imagination she had seen the bridal party surreptitiously entering the chapel, and Mr. Smith uniting the couple, in defiance of her husband. She also apprehended another revolutionary movement on the part of the bridegroom's friends. The note set her fears at rest, and had it been sent by Amos spontaneously, instead of having been extorted from him by the necessity of the case—for there was no other chapel within some miles of Oxbury that was licensed for marriages — her heart would have warmed towards the young man, in spite of all his past hostility. As it was, she could not resist the feeling that he had acted in a manner more characteristic than creditable.

The wedding took place three days

afterwards. It caused a prodigious commotion at Grange Street. Mr. Holland officiated, of course. The dissenting marriage service was read by him throughout *alone*, Amos Flint and Mary Gray being thereby made man and wife as effectually as if "Mr. Smith" had assisted.

Now the happy bridegroom had previously told Mr. Copperfox about the receipt of the unsatisfactory letter from Eskham. He had also given his friend to understand that he had reason to believe their suspicions would prove to be correct, although he did not mention the trifling circumstance that he had read Violet's letter. He counselled Mr. Copperfox to embrace the first opportunity of speaking to the minister upon the subject, since they might have to wait some time before intelligence reached them from Eskham. Thus the deacon's cousin was able to depart for the honeymoon, feeling that he had done all that was possible, and that he had left the matter in good hands.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. COPPERFOX'S TROUBLES.

Mr. Copperfox willingly accepted the responsibility that now devolved upon him. He felt that it was his duty to challenge Mr. Holland upon the subject of the Rector's intentions. At the same time he knew he would have to be careful, and to prepare the way very patiently. It would never do to cross-question the minister at a first interview, nor even at a second. Mr. Copperfox had been absent from Grange Street a long time; he now desired to return to it. All his astuteness would be needed to accomplish the ends he had in view. As a

preliminary movement he sent his wife back to the old chapel.

Mrs. Copperfox re-appeared at Grange Street one cold windy day in April. She sat near the door, for her old pew was occupied by the singers. At the close of the service she declared herself perfectly satisfied, and announced her intention to "come again." She kept her word; and on the afternoon of that second Sunday, as Mr. Holland was seated in his study, the servant came to say that Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox were in the sitting-room and wished to see him. The announcement, as may be supposed, caused the minister considerable surprise; and learning from the girl that her mistress was with the visitors, he remained a moment or two to think.

That their object was a friendly one he had no reason to doubt. He knew that Mr. Copperfox was not "comfortable" at Peeble's Lane. Could it be possible he wished to be re-dismissed? Surely not, for the man had not been with the new

community more than a month or two. To leave it so soon and to come back would be scarcely decent or judicious. What could he want, then? Finding himself unable to answer that question, the minister now descended the stairs slowly and thoughtfully to the sitting-room.

Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox rose as he entered, and each of them grasped his hand in a fervent manner. The former commenced the conversation by saying, with an air of great respect:

"We ought to apologise, sir, I'm sure, for intruding upon you, especially on such a day as this."

"Don't mention it," was the polite rejoinder, "I am glad to see you."

"We know, Mr. Holland, how busy you are on Sundays," said Mrs. Copperfox, "and therefore if you will excuse us, we will not stay long. It is not our wish, ma'am," she added, turning to Kate, with a smile, "it is not our wish to follow the example of one I might mention, by abusing your kindness."

"I think Mrs. Copperfox refers to Mr. Amos Flint," said Copperfox in explanation. "Allow me to say, sir," he added, "how glad I am you did not yield to that young man's wishes."

"Yes, we are very glad," assented Mrs. Copperfox. "It was very wrong of him to come here with such a request. The idea of you, sir, not being good enough to marry him, but he must have a minister down from London! What abominable pride."

"And what assurance he must have had," said Copperfox, "to ask you to lend him the chapel! Well, sir, everybody that has spoken to me on the subject says you did right to answer him as you did. It brought him to his senses, and showed him you are not to be trampled upon. You have been more respected ever since."

"Well, how do you get on at Peeble's Lane, Mr. Copperfox?" asked the minister, by way of changing the subject.

"Very badly indeed, sir," he replied.

"They ought not to have invited that Mr. Gedger. I was against him from the first, and so was Mrs. Copperfox."

"Yes," assented his wife, "we did what we could to prevent his coming, but the people would have their way."

"The worst of it is, sir," said Copperfox, "they are very much in debt, and yet they wish to build a large chapel. They want me to lend and give them more money, but I have done enough, I think. They had a piece of land from me, and I built them their room; and I don't know when they are going to pay me."

"He has made himself safe enough, ma'am," said Mrs. Copperfox, addressing Kate. "The room will become his in course of time; and he could turn them out now if he chose."

"And yet they don t treat me with proper respect," continued Copperfox. "They are willing to get all they can out of me, but if I only venture to make a suggestion about any matter of detail, or recommend any particular line of action at

any time, why, I am overruled directly. Mr. Gloss aims at getting entire control over there, but he has a rival in McGowan, who wishes to have an equal share of power, so between them there is sometimes a good deal of unpleasantness."

"I should think so," said Kate.

"That is how matters stand at Peeble's Lane," continued Copperfox. "I wish I was away from the place. I cannot leave it yet, however, for they have made me a deacon; but as soon as the twelve months are gone (we were elected for twelve months, sir) I shall decline to be re-elected, and shall come back to Grange Street."

"I am afraid we are keeping Mr. Holland too long," said Mrs. Copperfox, addressing her husband. "You had better state the business that has called us here this afternoon."

"Certainly," responded Copperfox briskly. "The fact is, sir, my wife and I have come as a kind of deputation."

"Oh, indeed," said the minister.

"Yes, sir; a deputation from Peeble's Lane."

Mr. Holland wondered what on earth the business could be, upon which the new community had commissioned his visitors to treat with him; but he said nothing.

"I need not make many words about it, sir," continued Copperfox, "for it is a very simple affair. It is just this: The people there are going to hold a special service in a few days—in fact, next Thursday night. Their own room will not afford the requisite accommodation; they have therefore sent us to you to ask if you will kindly allow them the use of your chapel for the occasion."

Copperfox went on to explain the nature of the service, and entered into particulars with which we need not trouble the reader. It will be sufficient if we state that long before he had finished his explanation, the required permission was granted — and granted without the least hesitation.

"We are exceedingly indebted to you, sir," said the visitors when they rose to

leave; "and we are sure the friends at Peeble's Lane will consider themselves under great obligation to you for your kindness."

Having thus made their acknowledgments, Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox bowed themselves out of the house.

Mr. Gloss and his companions duly appeared at Grange Street on the following Thursday evening. The chapel had been opened for their reception, and every needful preparation made; so they had no reason to complain of want of courtesy on the part of Mr. Holland. The latter was present at the special service in the capacity of a hearer. When the service was over, Mr. Gedger and Mr. Gloss came into the vestry and thanked him for having granted them the use of the building; and thus the affair came to an end.

The return of Copperfox to Grange Street took place about a month afterwards; and from that time he regularly sat with his wife in a pew Mr. Todd had formerly occupied in the gallery in front of the pulpit.

He was not a church-member as yet, but everybody knew he desired to become one, and that it would not be long before he made a formal application to be dismissed from Peeble's Lane—to which society he had belonged for not quite seven months.

Ever since his re-appearance at the old chapel Copperfox had been treated with marked civility, but still, with the exception of Mr. Flint and one or two others, it may be doubted whether the people were really glad to see him. The minister himself, although the submissiveness of his old enemy was almost abject, was much disquieted by his return, and on more than one occasion strongly advised him to continue with Mr. Gloss's community. Mr. Holland always showed towards him great friendliness, and endeavoured to believe in the sincerity of his repentance, nevertheless he could not help feeling that his reception into the church *might* be the prelude to a recurrence of those discreditable scenes which had rendered Grange Street noto-

rious. Those scenes, it is true, had taught the minister many valuable lessons. He had discovered that nothing but the completest personal supremacy could hold such unruly elements under any species of command. He thought he had learned in mastering them the secret of governing men, and knitting together their discordant hearts into an harmonious unity. But he had also been taught that such experience may be bought at too dear a price, and therefore he dreaded the re-admission of Copperfox into the church, which was now enjoying unbroken tranquillity.

Whether for good or evil, however, Copperfox had set his heart on again becoming a church-member. One day, Mr. Holland, who had long since been invited to call at the villa, and had been gently rebuked because of the infrequency of his visits, was sitting with Mr. and Mrs. Copperfox in their front parlour. The conversation had turned upon Grange Street affairs, and once or twice Copperfox had been on the point of asking the minister

to write for his dismission. Something in the demeanour of the latter, however, had warned him that his opportunity had not yet come; and as Copperfox was too wise a man to risk the success of any scheme by endeavouring to carry it prematurely, he had desisted from his purpose for the present, trusting that some circumstance or other would arise which might some day be turned to good account for the accomplishment of the end he had in view. Such a circumstance *did* arise, a minute or two afterwards.

"We know, sir," said Mrs. Copperfox, rising and walking to the other end of the room, "we all know how fond you are of music. There is something here that I think will please you."

So saying, she pointed to a small harmonium standing in the recess, and asked the minister what he thought of it.

"It is a very nice-looking instrument," said he, admiringly.

"Will you try the tone of it, sir, please?" said Copperfox, with a smile. "I bought

it last week, but there is no one in the house that can play it."

Mr. Holland sat down and played an anthem and one or two exercises, as well as he was able.

"I like the tone of it very much indeed," said he, when he had finished.

"I am glad to hear you say so, sir," said Copperfox. "I got the instrument very cheap, and now I shouldn't like to sell it for double the money. Miss Chingford is going to take lessons on it, and I very much wish I could play it myself."

"You see, sir," said Mrs. Copperfox, "his time hangs heavily upon his hands of a winter's evening, and if he could play it, it would be a sort of pastime."

"So it would," said the minister.

"I sometimes think I will set to work and begin to learn," Copperfox remarked.

"Well," replied his wife, "you know I have frequently said I wished you would do so."

"That is true," assented Copperfox; "but I am afraid I am too old."

"Do you think he is, Mr. Holland?" asked Mrs. Copperfox.

"Not at all," replied the minister. "I know many, older than Mr. Copperfox, who have learnt to play very creditably."

"That is very encouraging for you," said Mrs. Copperfox, turning to her husband. "What do you say now?"

"Why, that I have a good mind to begin," he replied.

"I would do so, by all means, Mr. Copperfox," said the visitor.

"You have two music pupils, haven't you, sir?" asked Mrs. Copperfox.

"Yes," replied Mr. Holland; "I am giving a little elementary instruction to two young people, members of the congregation, who asked me to put them in the way of playing a few psalm tunes."

"Ah, they learn very quickly, I have no doubt," said Copperfox, with a sigh; "but at my age it would be terribly difficult work."

"I don't think it would," said the minister, laughing. "If you were to put your-

self in my hands, I would undertake that you should soon be able to play the Old Hundredth."

"How much a quarter?" asked Copperfox.

"A guinea," was the jesting reply.

Nothing more was said upon the subject at that time, and after some conversation upon other topics, which it is unnecessary to relate, the minister took his leave.

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS FROM ESKHAM.

SEVERAL days passed, during which Mr. Holland did not again come into contact with his old antagonist. One morning, happening to pass Copperfox's place of business as that worthy man was standing at his shop-door, he was invited to enter, and was conveyed in triumph to the sitting-room.

"A grand day this is at the parish church, sir," said Copperfox, rubbing his hands briskly, and keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the minister's face. "Mr. Maxforth, I hear, has come to Oxbury on purpose to officiate at these nobby weddings. Hark at the bells! Squire Cornford's

daughter Arabella was married this morning to a barrister from London, and Miss Emily to the Rev. Mr. Praxton, of Scamborough. Mr. Peake, the new Rector, would have assisted, but he has gone to Manchester to take to himself a wife there. What a happy time it is! I used to think Mr. Maxforth would have one of the squire's daughters himself, sir. I wonder when *his* turn will come, and what lady he will marry?"

What a keen, searching glance the speaker's was at this moment! Yet the minister's face was immovable, nor did he change colour. "That is a question in which the ladies are considered to be more interested than you or I, Mr. Copperfox," he answered dryly. The other deemed it prudent to change the subject.

"Well, sir, you are getting on very well at Grange Street. Unfortunately, affairs are very different at Peeble's Lane. The pastor there ought to be turned out, I think."

"Has he done anything very criminal?" asked Mr. Holland.

"Oh dear, no, not at all."

"Are his sermons below the mark?"

"No, there is no particular fault to find on that score, but somehow—I can't say why—several people don't fancy the man. And when that is the case," added Copperfox significantly, "their breath has made him and can at any time unmake him again."

It occurred to the minister that it was an unwise thing to put power in the hands of a man like his interlocutor. By such as he the spiritual teacher would be regarded in no other light than that of a minion and upstart who ought to be circumvented and kept down. Such as he, having adopted any crotchet, or decided upon any scheme, would agitate and canvass untiringly until their private ends were gained. "How could any society," Mr. Holland asked himself, "with such as he among its members, and with the dissenting system, with its popular vote, to back them, expect to enjoy a solid and lasting peace?" He checked himself, and the proverb which speaks of

"fouling one's own nest," caused him to wish his experience at Oxbury had not been such a bitter one. "But it is not my business to pluck up the tares from among the wheat," he thought.

Another remark which Copperfox made at this moment caused him to open his eyes wide with surprise and curiosity.

"I think, sir, if it meets with your approval, I shall accept the offer you made the other day."

"What offer was that, Mr. Copperfox?" asked the perplexed minister.

"Don't you remember?"

"No."

"Have you no recollection of our talking about my harmonium?"

"Oh yes; certainly," replied Mr. Holland, with a smile.

"And you remember I said how much I should like to be able to play it?"

"Yes."

"And you said you wouldn't mind giving me lessons," continued Copperfox.

"Yes, I did say something of that sort."

"Are you still willing, sir?"

"Quite willing, Mr. Copperfox, if you are."

"Oh, I should be very glad, and I would come to you whenever you could make it convenient."

"Well, shall we say Tuesdays and Thursdays at seven o'clock?" asked the minister.

"That will suit me admirably," replied Copperfox. "I fear I shall try your patience very much, sir," he added; "for I shall be very slow and stupid, and my fingers are very stiff."

"Oh, I think you will come on satisfactorily, if you give your mind to it," said Mr. Holland. "I think you said you learnt the notes some time ago, did you not?"

"Yes," replied Copperfox, "I know the musical scale; that is to say, I learnt it when I was a young man. It is true, I haven't seen it since, but I fancy I should recognise it if it were shown to me."

"Well," said the minister, "we will make a beginning, if all be well, to-morrow."

"By all means," returned Copperfox, and so they parted.

Mr. Holland had several calls to make that day, but none of them prevailed to drive from his mind the singular and unforeseen arrangement he had made with his old enemy. If he discussed a philosophical topic with Roger Garrel, or the case of some sick and needy person with Dame Crock, the strangeness of the relationship he had just established with Copperfox again and again recurred to him, and he could scarcely help smiling at the change which had been brought about. At the same time, he felt quite sure that, in offering himself as a pupil, Copperfox had merely adopted a characteristic method of gaining his end with reference to the church at Grange Street.

Punctually at seven o'clock on the following evening Copperfox, in his best attire, appeared at the minister's house, and thence accompanied him through the back garden into the chapel. Here they could pursue their musical studies in

secrecy and retirement, and also have the use of the large harmonium which Larberry's zeal and energy had procured for the benefit of the people. Mr. Holland opened the instrument with loving care, while his pupil, standing close beside him, watched his proceedings with much interest. The lesson then commenced. To all appearance Copperfox was bent upon mastering the instructions conveyed to him. His eyes never wandered over the empty pews, which showed indistinctly in the dim evening light, but were fastened upon Mr. Holland, as the latter began to propound some elementary principle in the science under consideration. It was evident, however, that the disciple did not comprehend the meaning of what was said to him; and although he displayed the utmost docility, and his instructor laboured to simplify the lesson as much as possible, each of them was conscious that no progress had been made. Mr. Holland then turned to the key-board, and after explaining it fully, induced Copperfox to take his seat

at the instrument and make a beginning in the practical part of the lesson. Here the teacher met with better success, for his old enemy seemed mightily pleased with the sounds produced by the united efforts of his fingers and feet. Thus they went on, and by degrees a decided advance was accomplished, so that at the close of the lesson both of them said they felt greatly encouraged to persevere in their studies. Before closing the instrument the minister sat down and played through a psalm tune, while Copperfox looked on with admiration and delight.

"It will be a long time before I can play like that," said he, when the tune was finished.

"Oh no; it will not," replied Mr. Holland encouragingly. "You have only to persevere, and you will be sure to succeed in the end."

"Well, I am sure you have bestowed very great pains upon me to-night, sir. I ought to get on with such a teacher, I am sure. But I fear you will find me so dull that you will soon be discouraged."

"Not at all, Mr. Copperfox. If you will not mind the trouble of practising at home the exercise I have given you, you will master it in a very little time, and so by degrees you will acquire facility in playing."

"Thank you, sir; I will do so. I used to be able to play the fiddle very well, but I have not touched it now for years, and indeed have paid no attention to music of any kind. That is the reason you find me so slow."

They had now moved out of the chapel, and were standing in the minister's garden. Copperfox lingered irresolutely, and seemed to wish to broach another topic. At length he said:

"The church meetings are not very well attended even now, are they, sir?"

"Well, no. Several have been dismissed, as you are aware; and though others have joined us, we have scarcely filled up all the vacant places yet."

"Ah! Mrs. Copperfox has told me as much. Well, never mind; we must have

patience, and things will work round in time."

"I hope so," said Mr. Holland.

"The chapel walls want cleaning, sir, very badly, I noticed," said Copperfox.

"Yes, they do. The friends are giving their attention to that matter, and we shall soon see an alteration for the better."

After waiting about some little time longer, Copperfox took his leave, inwardly resolving that when he came for his next lesson he would ask to be dismissed from Peeble's Lane. Nor was the minister at all surprised when, on the following Tuesday evening, his old antagonist preferred his request in due form, and stated as his reason for doing so, that he had been very uncomfortable with Mr. Gloss's community, that he had lately been much profited by the preaching at Grange Street, and that Mr. Holland's kindness to him had entirely won his affection. What could the minister do under such circumstances? He had no right to judge the man's motives, although he might have very decided

opinions upon the subject. He had frequently endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose without effect. He now felt he could not do otherwise than accede to his wishes. He therefore told him that he would prepare the customary letter, and read it at the next church meeting. Great was the satisfaction of Copperfox on receiving this answer, and when he parted from Mr. Holland he went home rejoicing.

It happened that Mr. Flint called at the chapel-house on the following day. Copperfox's application was then named to him, upon which the deacon was pleased to remark that "he knew Brother Copperfox had long had a desire to join the church again, and that he (Mr. Flint) had no doubt it was their duty to receive him." In his opinion Copperfox was a very estimable man, and a decided acquisition to Grange Street. As for the shortness of his stay at Peeble's Lane, and the unsatisfactoriness of his connection with the society there, all that might easily be explained, and did not constitute an objection

against him in the least. Mr. Copperfox was a very particular man—a man who loved the truth, and was faithful as a witness to it. That was a decided recommendation. Receive him by all means. To all this the minister did not oppose very cogent arguments; indeed, he felt it would be an ungracious as well as hopeless work to attempt to use argument in the matter. The only reply the deacon would have given would have been that "Mr. Copperfox had an exceedingly tender conscience," which in the opinion of the former would have been a conclusive answer to every objection that could possibly be urged. The minister did not like Copperfox, notwithstanding his tender conscience. What then? Was the man to be kept out of the church on that account? The interview, therefore, between Mr. Holland and Mr. Flint ended with the understanding that the application was to be granted.

When the business meeting came to be held, the letter which the minister had pre-

pared was read and adopted. In due time it was despatched to Peeble's Lane. A month afterwards Mr. Holland read to his flock the answer he had received, which was accepted, and thus Copperfox again became a member of the society at Grange Street. Although for a time he prudently abstained from interference in its affairs, the atmosphere of the place was never precisely the same from that day forward. The nature of the man was unaltered; and the freedom, the harmony, the breadth, the solemnity of the meetings seemed to be impaired—perhaps for ever.

Having now gained one of the objects he had in view, and despairing of eliciting any information from the minister regarding Mr. Maxforth's movements, the ambition of Copperfox to become a proficient on the harmonium began to cool rapidly. One pretext after another was urged as an excuse for non-attendance at the chapel-house; the intervals between the music-lessons manifestly widened; and at length Mr. Holland received an intimation from

his old antagonist that he was compelled to relinquish his studies altogether. "The stiffness of his finger-joints, his dulness, and the little time he had to spare," were the grounds upon which Copperfox said he must discontinue his visits, and thus this remarkable pupil was seen by the minister no more.

It was on a sultry evening, in the beginning of September, that Copperfox admitted into his sitting-room Amos Flint, who was pale and almost breathless with excitement. "The news we have so long looked for has come at last!" said Amos, and he took from his pocket a letter, which he handed to his friend. Copperfox devoured its contents with the greatest eagerness. Mr. Shotton therein stated that his illness had been of so serious a nature, and his recovery so tardy, that he had been quite unable to make a journey to Seftwick until that very day. He trusted, however, that the important discovery he had made would atone for the long delay, and would not be received too late to be of use.

Mr. Maxforth, of Hurdale, was engaged to be married to Miss Vaveley, and the banns had already been once proclaimed in the parish church, Seftwick. He had not been able to find out on what day the wedding was to take place, but he would not fail to ascertain the exact date, and communicate it as soon as possible.

When the letter had been read throughout, the two men looked at one another for several moments in silence. At length Copperfox drew a deep breath and said:

"Now, dear brother, we must make up our minds *what we will do!*"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEACON RENOUNCES MR. STAGGERS.

"THIS letter from your cousin," said Copperfox, "confirms what I have said all along, that our minister is in league with the Church party, and that he cares nothing for the interests of his own people. If we had not resisted him he would have led us astray long since. Now if we allow him to form fresh ties with that Church party our case will be worse than ever. We must keep our Zion pure and free from all alliance or connection with Babylon. We must resist the minister in this matter, dear brother. He must be made either to renounce and repudiate this clergyman and his doings, or he must take himself off, bag

and baggage, from Grange Street. Now I would suggest that we bring Mr. Shotton's letter before the church and have it read to the brethren and sisters. It will speak for itself."

"And it would be rich to watch Mr. Holland's confusion when he saw he was found out, wouldn't it?" returned Amos. "But you forget that our church meeting has already been held, and that the date of the next is subsequent to the wedding, and therefore too late."

"Then let us have a special meeting called, dear brother," said Copperfox.

"I doubt whether it would be advisable to do so," returned Amos. "Besides, it occurs to me that Mr. Holland would give this answer—he would say he never had any knowledge of the affair, and had nothing to do with it."

"Suppose we show him this letter privately then, at his own house, and ask him what he has to say to it?"

"I know beforehand what he would say," replied Amos. "He would tell us it was

no business of ours, that he had never known about it, and so on. Now if he should declare that he never had part or lot in the matter, we could not disprove the assertion, and our case would fall to the ground. Listen! He will go to this wedding. I heard to-day that he has told the deacons he wished to go away from Oxbury for a few days at the end of September. We should have a strong case against him if we could prove he had been present when they were married. Let us go to Seftwick ourselves; see the ceremony with our own eyes; and confront him in the presence of the bride and bridegroom!"

"We will! we will!" cried Copperfox in an ecstacy. "What a scene it will be!"

"My cousin Shotton," said Amos, after they had chuckled awhile, "has often asked me to spend a week or two at Eskham, and I know he will be glad to receive you and me at his house. It is at the sea-side, you know; and it will be delightful to combine

business with pleasure. The weather is quite tropical just now in Oxbury."

The two men sat together a long time, arranging the details of their scheme; and finally they decided not to fix the exact date of their journey to Eskham until they had heard again from Mr. Shotton.

The minister meanwhile was quietly pursuing his course at Grange Street, thankful for the short respite he was now favoured with, but anxiously awaiting fresh disturbances. He did not know from what quarter they would come, but he had made up his mind they were inevitable.

Just at present the efforts of his friends were bearing good fruit in other ways besides those already mentioned, for about this period Mr. Flint abandoned his position as a neutral, and came forward as Mr. Holland's supporter. He was impelled to do so, he said, "by the vitality and energy he witnessed on every side at the chapel." This was in July, about two months before Amos Flint received that startling news from Eskham, and when Mr. Copperfox

was beginning to be weary of those music lessons on the harmonium. Mr. Copperfox had ventured to tell the minister that one deacon was not enough to do the work of the society satisfactorily, which was quite true, and he had recommended that there should be another election. Mr. Copperfox revelled in elections; his soul delighted in them exceedingly. "They kept the dear brethren and sisters alive," he would say. But poor Mr. Holland trembled at the bare idea of repeating the disastrous experiments of past days. He thought the society needed a little "breathing time." When he considered the result of previous attempts, he did not feel at all inclined to advocate an addition to the diaconate. "Let matters rest as they are for a while," he would answer. If offences and disagreements must come, at any rate he would not now open the door for their entrance. Had not Grange Street been convulsed again and again by divisions? Was it not surprising that a short interval of tranquillity had come at last? If an

election were to take place, that tranquillity would most certainly be disturbed. Moreover it was not the wish of the people generally that other deacons should be chosen. The answer, therefore, which the minister usually gave to Copperfox's urgent entreaties was, that "it was not desirable to re-awaken feelings of partisanship, especially as Mr. Flint was able to do the work of three men, *and did it.*"

But although the time had not come for any addition to the diaconate, there was one measure which Mr. Holland and the deacon thought should be submitted to the church without delay. It was a measure affecting Mr. Staggers and a few others. The reader will perhaps recollect that Roger Garrel had brought forward a resolution which provided that any member absenting himself from the communion for the space of twelve months should forfeit the privilege of belonging to the society. That resolution was passed unanimously, and duly entered in the church-book. Nearly two years had since elapsed; and

although Mr. Staggers and others had absented themselves in defiance of the rule, it had never been put in force. This fact was felt to be highly discreditable, and injurious to the interests of Grange Street. It was a laxity of discipline calculated to bring the church into contempt. The long delay had been caused, partly by the reluctance of the minister to bring the matter forward, and partly by the indifference of Mr. Flint. As for the church-members, although several of them had often complained in private because the resolution was not carried into effect, yet they had not until now been urgent upon the subject. But now it seemed to be generally felt that decisive measures ought to be taken; and accordingly Mr. Holland and the deacon held a consultation, one evening in July, as to what sort of communication Mr. Staggers and the others should receive in the first instance.

"I think, sir," said Mr. Flint, "some kind of notice should be given them of what the church intends to do."

"Certainly," replied the minister. "That would be only fair."

"Perhaps, if you were to write to Mr. Staggers *privately*, sir, it might have a good effect."

"*It might*," answered Mr. Holland, with some hesitation. "At any rate I will do so, if you like."

"Well, it would do no harm, sir. Suppose you were to write him a confidential letter, calling his attention to the rule made two years ago—I presume, sir, you have it in the church-book?"

"Yes," replied the minister, producing the book from a neighbouring shelf and turning to the page; "here it is;" and he read aloud to his subordinate the resolution in question.

"Well, sir, I should call his attention to that, and I should then invite him to return to us, stating that in case he fails to do so, the church must at once take the matter into consideration, and put the rule in force."

"I have no objection at all to urge

against writing a letter of that description," said Mr. Holland smiling. "At the same time, I don't think he will return to us."

"Neither do I, sir. It will be a mere matter of form on your part, but it will give him a chance, and will look well."

"That is true," said the minister.

"I think there is no doubt," continued Mr. Flint, "that the answer we receive from the other absentees will depend very much upon that of Mr. Staggers. If he decides to return, they will do so, too; and if he prefers to be withdrawn from, they also will prefer it. His influence is still considerable in that quarter, though it is nothing like so great as it was. He used to be considered quite an oracle years ago; but he has so frequently been proved a false prophet of late years, that people have nearly lost their faith in him."

"It is a pity," said Mr. Holland, "they ever allowed themselves to be led by such a guide."

"Yes, sir, it is a great pity. Undoubtedly he has done mischief to our church.

I often think of the harm he did previous to your appearance, and during the time we were looking out for a pastor. More than one root of bitterness sprang up amongst us at that time, to trouble us."

"So I have heard," said Mr. Holland.

"And then, his behaviour to you," continued the deacon, "was very bad indeed. To write such a letter as that he sent to Dr. Curler, on his own authority alone, and after you had accepted the invitation of the church, was positively disgraceful."

"I felt it very keenly at the time," said the minister, drawing his right hand across his forehead. "You can hardly imagine, indeed, how great a trouble it was to me."

"Yes I can, sir. And then the getting up of that requisition was chiefly his doing. He induced people to come to his house to draw it up, and was very anxious about getting signatures to it. And many times since then he has called private meetings, with a view to arranging the affairs of

Grange Street according to his peculiar fancy."

"Has he?" said Mr. Holland.

"Yes, sir," replied the deacon, who on this occasion was more communicative and confidential than he had ever been known to be previously. "There were several meetings of that kind held at his house a year or two ago, but I would not attend them. I believe Mr. Copperfox and Mr. Albert Winstock were there, and one or two others; but they found it useless to continue their deliberations, and have not met recently."

Mr. Flint's usual caution and reticence had so completely forsaken him, that the minister could scarcely believe it was the same man who was speaking. One thing was clear, namely, that Mr. Staggers was now a person of very little importance in the deacon's estimation.

"I suppose, sir," said Mr. Flint, after a pause, "you don't often find yourself in Mr. Staggers' company, do you?"

"Well, the fact is," replied Mr. Holland,

smiling, "he has from the first avoided me as much as possible. I have frequently attempted to get access to him, thinking that if we knew each other better, it might be to the advantage of both parties. But I was never able to succeed. In cases where we have been accidentally thrown together, his manner has been distant and patronising; and though I have ardently wished for a reconciliation, he has never shown the least inclination for it. Sometimes, if he stood at his shop-door, and saw me coming along the street, he would turn in, rather than exchange a salutation with me."

"I think he is half ashamed of himself for having treated you so badly, sir," said the deacon.

"It may be so," assented Mr. Holland, with a sigh; "but still, that is hardly the way to make amends for the past."

"It is not, indeed," said Mr. Flint; "and even if we put the most favourable construction possible upon his behaviour, he can scarcely be said to act towards you

as a Christian and a gentleman should do."

"So you think I had better write to him privately?" asked Mr. Holland, when the deacon rose to leave.

"Yes, sir, if I were in your place I would do so."

"Very well."

"And then," continued the deacon, in a whisper, as he went out at the front door, "the future action of the church will depend upon his answer; only you will be sure to make him understand that we are of opinion it is high time the resolution passed two years ago was carried into effect."

When the door had closed upon the retreating figure of Mr. Flint, the minister returned to his study, and sat down to write the letter. The composition of it cost him a great amount of labour, and many drafts were torn up as soon as they were written. He was anxious to convey his meaning in courteous and even conciliatory terms, and as briefly as possible. At length he

achieved his purpose, and having directed the letter, he went out and posted it. His mind now employed itself in various speculations as to what kind of answer the trustee would send him. At first he had thought it just possible he would not deign to send any reply at all; but on reflection he had altered his opinion, and he now rested in the conviction that the answer, come when it might, would, at any rate, be a pungent one.

He hoped, however, that his antagonist would not think he was seeking a petty revenge for past injuries by an "act of persecution."

CHAPTER XIV.

"I IMPLORE YOU NOT TO GO."

When poor Mr. Holland, after waiting more than a week, received no reply from his cynical antagonist, he began to think that his first surmise would prove to be correct, and that the trustee intended to treat his communication with silent contempt. It would not have surprised him had this been the case, since he had long ceased to expect any courtesy from that quarter. Mr. Larberry, too, had assured him Mr. Staggers would never write. The ironmonger laughed at the bare idea of such a thing. One day in August—for we have taken the reader back a little, and are treating of events that took place while Mr.

Shotton was an invalid, and Amos Flint was yet anxiously awaiting intelligence from Eskham—the minister sat in the little front room, sorrowfully convinced that Larberry would prove a true prophet, when lo! the ironmonger himself came in, looking as brisk and restless as ever.

"Well, sir," said Larberry, "we are making progress, I think, at last. Your opponents' mouths are stopped—that's one comfort; and our harmonium works well—that's another. Oh, what a splendid instrument it is! I could sit listening to its strains for hours together. Have you heard from Mr. Staggers, sir.?"

"Not yet," returned the minister, with a sigh.

"Ah, and you never will! But the law must take its course, and his name must be struck off the books, and Mr. Snooley's too. They can't call themselves martyrs, for we have waited a year and a half. Nobody ought to pity them."

"I fear, nevertheless, it will be termed petty persecution," said Mr. Holland uneasily.

"Not it, sir; they know you better. Goodness me! They never bark now—they are all dumb dogs. At first their plea was that your wife was a mem- of the Establishment, and you had been married in church; then afterwards they declared you didn't preach the gospel; but long since they have become ashamed of talking such nonsense, and they positively haven't a leg to stand on. I have never been at a loss to make out what the cause of their opposition really was. If you had made love to any of the girls here before you married, or had insulted Mr. Staggers, or anything of that sort, their conduct would have been less inexcusable. But they never made any such charges. It's their bigotry. Look at the Todds, for instance. If any one asks them why they turned against you, they accuse you of nothing, and the most they say is, you were married in church, and they did not profit under you.' That is all I have been able to get out of the farmer and his family, sir. Well, it's the same with the rest of

them; and when I think of the shameful way in which they have treated you on such slight grounds, and remember that they would never allow you a fair trial before condemning your preaching, sir, I can hardly keep my indignation within bounds."

Mr. Holland believed the ironmonger was quite sincere, and he fully appreciated the sympathy these words conveyed. He therefore returned a suitable reply, and while doing so he saw the postman pass the front window. A minute afterwards the servant-maid brought in a letter. It was evidently from Mr. Staggers. As soon as Larberry had gone the minister took the letter with him into the study. When he began to read it he saw there was no hope of a reconciliation. He had asked the trustee if he would return to Grange Street. To that question, Mr. Staggers stated in the letter, he "declined to give any reply at all." As to the resolution, he "protested against its being carried into effect," except under certain conditions which he then propounded. Finally, he

declared that he should refuse to receive any further communication of a private nature that Mr. Holland might address to him.

This letter was shown to Mr. Flint, and it was arranged that a formal and official notice should be prepared, to be submitted to the business meeting. This was accordingly done, and having been approved by the society, was signed in their name by the minister and deacon. It was then despatched to Mr. Staggers. A similar notice was conveyed to each of the other absentees, whose replies were now awaited with some anxiety.

Now some of these notices were delivered by Philip in person. One morning he called with that intent at the house of Mr. Snooley, whose wife opened the door and invited him in. Mr. Holland entered the little kitchen, where three or four ragged urchins were playing upon the floor, and he began to talk pleasantly to them, and to stroke their curly heads.

"My husband isn't at 'ome, sir," said the

woman, pleased with the minister's evident admiration of her children. "I wish he was, as he might ha' seen ye."

Mr. Holland told her his business kindly, and handed her the notice.

"I expected it, sir," sobbed poor Mrs. Snooley, wiping her eyes; "but it's no more than what is right that we should get it. We have been away so long I wonder it ain't been done afore."

"And why have you kept away?" asked Philip gently.

"I can't rightly say, sir—one thing and another; it was all a mistake, sir, I'm sure. Oh dear! oh dear! The Lord ha' mercy on us, we be all bad uns." And she covered her tearful face with her apron.

"Will you come back to us, Mrs. Snooley?"

"Well, I would like to, sir, I'm sure; but I must speak to my husband about it an' hear what he says," answered the woman with another flow of tears.

They talked together for some time, and when Mr. Holland left the house he

was inclined to think they both intended to return. He did not, however, sufficiently take into account the disposition of Mr. Snooley, who was the ruling spirit. A day or two afterwards the poor minister was painfully undeceived by a letter from the ex-deacon—written in so offensive a strain and containing so many discrepancies that he resolved to call particular attention to it when the next business meeting came to be held, since Mr. Snooley requested to be "dismissed" to another society.

Solemn letters were also received from Mr. Staggers and the other "absentees." They simply stated—what everybody at Grange Street had learned to expect—that the writers had no intention of returning. In all these cases the law would have to take its course.

In due time the evening arrived on which the business meeting was to be held. It was generally known that important matters would be brought forward, and there was an overflowing company. The usual preliminaries having

been gone through, the minister with a trembling voice read Mr. Staggers' letter. Mr. Flint then stiffly proposed "that Mr. Staggers be withdrawn from, and his name taken off the books." In mellifluous tones Roger Garrel seconded the motion, and it was carried unanimously. Thus Grange Street knew the trustee no more for ever, and the whirligig of time had brought its revenges.

Some of the druggist's followers were dealt with in the same way, but Mr. Snooley's case was postponed till the next meeting in order to give him time to explain the discrepancies in his letter.

"These have been sad shipwrecks of the faith and of a good conscience," said Reuben Crock's wife to Mr. Flint, as they were all leaving the schoolroom. "These misguided men were never 'ruled by the rudder,' as the saying is, so now they are 'ruled by the rock.' It is a bad ending."

The deacon made no reply, but moved hastily away. He had plenty of trouble upon his mind besides that connected with

the proceedings of the evening, and there was a purpose he had formed which he meant to accomplish before he allowed himself sleep or rest. He intended to make an earnest appeal and a solemn remonstrance to his cousin and Mr. Copperfox. The correspondence Amos had been carrying on with Mr. Shotton, with its results, and the intention of the two men to be present at the wedding at Seftwick, had all come to his knowledge that afternoon. Mr. Flint meant to prevent their going, if he could. He meant to point out the folly of their conduct, and to urge them to abandon their design. He knew the two men were at that moment making their final arrangements for the journey, at Mr. Copperfox's house. With his brows knit and his head thrown back he walked thither at a rapid pace, and knocking at the door was admitted by Mrs. Copperfox. It was she who had been the deacon's informant. Having exchanged signals, they both quietly entered the room where the men were sitting.

"Take a chair, Brother Flint," said Copperfox, who was surprised and not particularly pleased at the interruption; but after a pause, having glanced keenly round, he added, speaking to Amos, "I think we had better tell your cousin about this strange matter that has come to light."

"Well, if you like you may," returned Amos, somewhat reluctantly.

"Of course, Peter, you ought to tell Mr. Flint. He will be able to give you good advice," said Mrs. Copperfox to her husband. She preferred it should not be known that the secret had already been divulged to the deacon by herself.

Mr. Flint sat grim and silent.

Copperfox, thus encouraged, proceeded to put the deacon in possession, as he thought for the first time, of the facts relating to Violet and the Rector, with which the reader is already acquainted. As he went on, Mr. Flint's brow became more and more clouded; and when, in conclusion, the narrator avowed his intention of going to Seftwick in company with his

friend, the deacon could restrain his anger and impatience no longer.

"You will do no good by going, Mr. Copperfox," said he sternly; "nor do I see that you or any one else has any right to interfere with Mr. Maxforth. He is entitled to marry the lady if he pleases: it is no concern of ours at all."

"But if our minister goes to this wedding we *are* concerned in the matter," said Amos.

"Mr. Holland has told you he wishes to leave Oxbury in a fortnight for a few days, has he not, Brother Flint?" asked Copperfox.

"Yes; but I cannot say that he is going to Seftwick."

"You may depend he *is* going," remarked Mrs. Copperfox energetically. "He has always been sly and underhand. Oh, the wretch!"

"We mean," said Amos, "to meet him face to face *there*, and then no denials or subterfuges can avail him."

"And what do you propose doing

after your return?" asked the deacon, frowning.

"We mean," replied Copperfox, "to bring the case before our dear brothers and sisters, and get them if we can to mark their disapproval of his conduct by a vote of censure. He may be requested to resign perhaps, and give place to a successor who will keep the truth pure and undefiled, and have no dealings with Babylon."

"Would you once more unsettle the society by dragging in a matter of this kind?"

"I would, dear brother."

"Certainly," said Amos.

"To be sure we would," assented Mrs. Copperfox. "Let him be made an example of."

"And *I* say," cried Mr. Flint, raising his voice, "that the interests of our society —which we all have at heart—can never be served by such a course of action."

"But surely, Brother Flint," exclaimed Copperfox, "you do not approve of this alliance?"

"I should hope not indeed!" chimed in Amos indignantly.

"*That* I'm convinced he does not!" said Mrs. Copperfox coaxingly.

"You know my views," answered Mr. Flint in a severe tone. "You know how I deplored Mr. Holland's marriage. I deplore it still; but we must make the best of the circumstances in which we are placed. Do not let us cast any more firebrands. And we must remember that our minister could no more control Mr. Maxforth's proceedings than we can. He is not answerable for him, any more than we are. Moreover if Mr. Holland chooses to attend this wedding and sanction it, which he probably may do, even then we should not be justified in any interference with him."

"I say we should," affirmed Amos.

"So say I," said Mrs. Copperfox.

"I must own I differ from you, Brother Flint," said her husband.

"Well, I will not argue the point further," said the deacon. "I see you are bent upon going——"

"We are."

"And I have no power to prevent you."

"None."

"But," continued Mr. Flint, rising from his chair, and speaking with great solemnity these last words of warning, "if you go, trouble will come of it which we cannot now foresee. Perhaps you yourselves will be the greatest sufferers. Think of the reputation of the society to which you belong, which should be dearer to you than life; think of your religion; think of your God. All these will be dishonoured, in my opinion, if you carry out your purpose. I implore you not to go!"

His words were spoken in vain; the men had hardened their hearts, and would not be turned aside from the path they had chosen. Even Mrs. Copperfox, who had always agreed with the deacon's views hitherto, and had deferred to him in everything, was at variance with him on this point.

"You advise us, Brother Flint," remarked Copperfox, "to think of the repu-

tation of our society. That is just what we *are* thinking of——"

"Hear, hear," said Amos.

"You say," continued Copperfox, "'think of your religion.' We *do* think of it, and we wish it to be kept from contamination——"

"We do," assented Amos.

"Therefore," concluded Copperfox, whose eyes were twinkling with satisfaction at his own logical ability, "our arguments are sound and sufficient. We have made up our minds to go, *and go we will*, dear brother."

"Then I have no more to say," answered Mr. Flint, taking up his hat. "The consequences will be upon your own heads."

With these words he left the room, and the house.

CHAPTER XV.

GOING TO THE WEDDING.

Mr. Holland, as we have seen, was not entirely free from forebodings of some catastrophe or convulsion that would cause fresh anguish to his people and to himself. These forebodings were never absent from his mind. It was not that he apprehended any interference at the wedding. He was not aware that his opponents had any knowledge of what was about to take place. But he was in a state of continual uneasiness lest when they came to hear of it, which they would be sure to do sooner or later, it would be made the occasion for a new outbreak of hostilities. At present there was smoothness and calm at Grange

Street. It was amazing to see the impatience with which the minister's friends resented any attempt to molest him. It was put down at once. Mr. Holland would tell his wife with a smile that he really believed he must be a person of some consequence, since the people were so anxious to uphold his dignity. "But it will not last," he would add, sighing, "it will not last. I wish they would not make all this fuss about Mr. Snooley."

For the people would insist upon Mr. Snooley making "an apology" to the minister as well as an explanation, and they had found the ex-deacon somewhat stubborn.

Now the fact that the Grange Street community had censured him for his letter, and required him to explain its discrepancies, reached the ears of Mr. Snooley the day after Mr. Flint's memorable remonstrance, recorded in the last chapter. The news caused him no little astonishment. The ex-deacon had considered that missive a masterly perform-

ance. He had never dreamed of being called to account for it. When he found that even Mr. Flint would not justify him, but characterised the effusion as "personal, offensive, and insulting," the man was sorely ruffled.

One day Mr. Flint called upon the minister and told him he had seen Mr. Snooley several times, and had endeavoured to bring him to proper views on the subject; but that hitherto his efforts had been entirely unavailing.

"I told him," said the deacon, shaking his head, "that messengers had been appointed, who would wait upon him."

The minister thanked him, but he wished in his heart at the same time that the matter might be allowed to drop, lest Mr. Snooley should consider himself a martyr, and talk of "petty persecution."

"He expressed a wish," continued Mr. Flint, "to be present at our next church meeting, in order to make a statement upon the subject. I told him he had absented himself for so long a time that he

had virtually forfeited his right to do so."

How changed is Mr. Flint since we first knew him; but oh! how careful not to allude to the Rector's approaching wedding, or to his stormy interview with Copperfox and his cousin!

The messengers of whom Mr. Flint had spoken called at the chapel-house the next day, and told Mr. Holland they had been to see Mr. and Mrs. Snooley, but that the result had not been satisfactory. "Would he kindly write a note to the young man, requesting him to come and explain his difficulties to the minister himself, as a little conversation might do good." Mr. Holland promised to write, and he did so.

At the time appointed Mr. Snooley made his appearance at the chapel-house, twirling his cap in his hand as he entered the sitting-room with an air of mingled confusion and defiance. The minister greeted him in a pleasant manner, and invited him to take a chair. The ex-

deacon did so unwillingly and with a bad grace.

Be patient with him, Mr. Holland, for Mr. Snooley's is the last official business you will ever transact in Oxbury.

"I was somewhat hurt by your letter, Mr. Snooley—but that's a trifle. In former times we had a few passages of arms—let us forget them. The good people at Grange Street want some sort of explanation—authorise me to tell them your letter was written in heat, but that you did not wish to give unnecessary offence. If you part from us and go elsewhere, let there be no ill-blood between you and me."

Thus spake the minister, hoping his antagonist would relent. But the ex-deacon believed he had been deprived of office through Mr. Holland's influence, and could not forgive the fancied injury. He was mistaken, as we know; but no arguments had been sufficient to remove the impression.

"I will retract nothing," he said.

"Then I fear the good people of Grange Street will not grant your request for a 'letter of dismission,'" answered the minister with a sigh.

Then Mr. Snooley commenced a long story, giving *his* version of the events that had happened at Grange Street, and bringing up once more all the old grievances. After Mr. Holland had with great pains cleared up one point and another, his antagonist was at length induced to say he would "think it over." The man then went away. A letter arrived from him soon afterwards which by a great stretch of charity and the exercise of a vivid imagination might be construed as an apology. This the minister carefully put aside in his study to be read at the next business meeting.

That business meeting, Mr. Holland, is a long way off, and much will happen before then!

Now the Rector's wedding had been fixed for the twenty-ninth of the month, but the minister and his wife were expected at

the little cottage on Seftwick Green two days previously. As soon as the morning dawned on which their long journey was to be made, the inmates of the chapel-house were astir, and had commenced their preparations.

They had made up their minds to spend a very happy time at Seftwick. Kate kept up a constant stream of pleasant talk with her husband about the visit as they corded their boxes and strapped their portmanteaus in the little hall. They would enjoy themselves thoroughly, and lay in a stock of health before resuming their struggles and harassing occupations at home. The briny air, the laughter, the fun, the familiar chats with those they loved, and who could fully sympathise with them as they recounted the trials and vicissitudes through which they had passed, —it was delightful to anticipate all these changes, which would put new life into them both, they said.

Talking thus they walked to the railway station, having sent on their luggage in a

cab. They did not look about them when they arrived there, for their train was already drawn up at the platform, and Mrs. Holland had to superintend the conveyance of the luggage to the van, while her husband got their tickets. No, they did not look about them, or they would have seen Copperfox and Amos Flint, who had been narrowly watching them for some time, and who had retreated to the farther end of the platform, where they had entered a third-class carriage belonging to the same train.

A minute afterwards, with a whistle from the engine, the journey had begun.

How blithe was Kate as she sat by her husband's side, with her sturdy little son upon her lap, and prattled of all the delights in store for them at Seftwick.

"What a remarkable series of events, dear; and what an astonishing result! I used to be a little bit afraid of Mr. Maxforth, and to think that he has been in love with our Violet all this time, and is to be our brother-in-law!"

The minister laughed, and said he was proud of the connection, of course.

"Proud of it, dear! I should think so indeed. But yet our Vi is quite worthy of him for all that."

The minister answered Yes, she was quite worthy of him, undoubtedly.

"When we get to my mother's and meet her, and the Rector, and my darling sister, you will throw off all your cares and be as happy as the rest, won't you, dear?" asked the little woman, with tears in her eyes.

The minister promised that he would conscientiously devote the interval to jollity.

Thus the time wore on, and they advanced ever nearer to their destination. Mrs. Holland was impatient to see the rolling waves and to know she was close to the blessed place where she could throw her arms around the ones she loved. Her husband quietly assured her they would not reach Seftwick until seven o'clock that evening; they therefore settled

down to endure the fatigues of the journey as well as they were able.

While the above conversation was going on, Copperfox and Amos Flint, who were seated at the other end of the train in a compartment next the engine, were in high spirits because so far everything had happened as they wished, and it seemed probable that their project would be crowned with success.

"*He* little thinks *we* are here, dear brother," said Copperfox, after cautiously putting his head out of the window and again withdrawing it. "*He* must not meet us nor even see us till we are at our journey's end, and till the *day* and the *hour* have come."

"If he did it would spoil the pleasure he will experience when he meets us on a gay and festive occasion, wouldn't it?" said Amos, grinning.

So much was this joke relished that it was fully half an hour before the two men recovered from its effects.

They had travelled about two hundred

miles when the younger man, putting his head cautiously out of the window and looking up and down the line, muttered in a weary tone :

"We must take care not to pass the junction. *We* must change, you know, at Duddenham station for Eskham, which is on the south shore of the bay. *They* will go right on to Seftwick."

"Of course, dear brother," assented Copperfox, rubbing his hands; "they go on, while *we* are to spend a day with your cousin, by his kind invitation, before we join the wedding party."

"We will cross the bay to-morrow in a boat, if the weather continues favourable, otherwise we must go round by rail," said Amos.

"I hope *they* won't see us when we get out at the junction," remarked his companion.

A minute afterwards, as the train glided into a small station, they heard porters shouting :

"Duddenham! Duddenham! change here for Eskham!"

The two men got out quickly and retreated into a waiting-room.

When the train conveying Mr. Holland and his wife was out of sight, they emerged from their hiding-place. In a little while they were able to resume their journey, and arrived in Eskham as night was falling. The furnace-fires were blazing fiercely and though it was growing dark they could see that the place was covered with heaps of slag and ashes. It was an iron ore district, and the population was composed chiefly of miners and their families. Mr. Shotton —a tall, large-boned, grimy-looking man of about fifty years, was himself a miner. He received the two wayfarers with a few gruff words of welcome, and in his house they made themselves at home.

"I will frankly own to you, Dick," said Amos, addressing his cousin, "that there were three reasons why I accepted your kind invitation to come and bring my friend here. The first is, the pleasure of seeing you again after our separation for seven years; the next, the opportunity of enjoy-

ing, in this sultry season of the year, your pure bracing air at the seaside ; and lastly, the interest I feel in the wedding that is to take place at Seftwick the day after to-morrow. We propose either to cross or go round the bay to-morrow, and to spend a night in Seftwick, otherwise we shall be too late, probably, to see the wedding. Now, what is the distance from here to Seftwick *by rail?*"

"It'd tak' ye aboot 'arf a dee," replied Mr. Shotton in a husky voice; and after this laconic answer he relapsed into silence.

It would never do, the men concluded, to take this longer route, if they could help it. It would consume too much of their time, and be too fatiguing after the journey they had just completed. They decided, therefore, that if it should prove practicable and safe to do so, they would go by water. It was late when they retired to rest. We trust their prayers were long and fervent that night.

The morning broke bright and cloudless, and when they looked out upon the smiling

bay with its small craft gleaming in the sun, the two men rejoiced and exulted in prospect of the sail they had planned. They went down to the landing-place and chartered a boat with a man and boy, arranging that it should be ready to take them across at six o'clock that evening, for they did not wish to reach Seftwick until dusk, because of the risk they would otherwise run of being seen and recognised. They spent the morning in rambling idly upon the beach, the afternoon in Dick Shotton's cabin. At six o'clock they bade farewell to their host—for they proposed not to return to Eskham, but to take the train home from Seftwick after the wedding—and stepped into the boat. Their unpractised eyes discerned no threatening change in the sky—nothing to occasion alarm. The westering sun was now hidden by clouds, and a little wind had risen, but they saw no signs of a storm. The fisherman and the boy were somewhat uneasy as they pushed off from the shore, and owned they "hardly liked the look o't."

But it was only five miles across, and there was "nowt to fear for some hours to come mayhap." Thus Copperfox and Amos Flint committed themselves to the winds and waves.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FISHERMAN'S STORY.

QUITE unaware of the presence in the train of the two confederates, who had not been seen either at Duddenham Junction or at any other stage of the journey, Mr. Holland and his wife had quietly travelled along, reaching Seftwick at last in the dusk of the evening. Violet, blushing like a rose, and her splendid eyes sparkling with happiness, was at the station, with her mother, to welcome them. Soon they were in the little cottage on the green, and a right merry company they were.

Mr. Maxforth, it transpired, was expected to be in the village on the following day. He would spend the night at "The Seven

Stars." Mr. Praxton also was coming from Scamborough, for he was to "assist" the vicar of the parish at the bridal. These, with the two bridesmaids and the bridegroom's best man—a gentleman from Oxford—comprised the company invited to the wedding breakfast. The wedding itself was to be quiet and simple. When Kate had seen the bridal dress and the presents, and when all the topics which the sight of these interesting objects suggests to the feminine mind had been discussed but not exhausted, it was really so very late that they were fain to retire to bed.

The bright and cloudless morning which rejoiced the hearts of the two men looking out from Mr. Shotton's cabin at Eskham, brought unutterable gladness to Violet, for her lover came with it; and in his companionship there was heaven indeed. The two young people were together a good deal during the forenoon, and the hours sped by on golden wings. Afterwards, the women were left together to complete

the preparations for the wedding, while Mr. Maxforth and the minister strolled together on the beach. It yet wanted some hours before the arrival of Mr. Praxton and the gentleman from Oxford —indeed, they were not expected until late that evening. The Rector and his companion had much to talk about, for they had not met before since the former had made his farewell visit at the chapel-house. It was a delightful ramble. Although the sky was not so clear as it had been in the early morning, they could distinctly make out the different villages and hamlets on the opposite shore of the bay—Tambury, the small watering-place, rather dim and hazy because farthest off of all; then Torwick, then Eskham, with its furnaces, its ironstone quarries, its heaps of cinders and slag, and the very doors and windows of the cottages, all visible to the naked eye. There were two other men pacing those distant sands at that moment whom they did not regard or recognise, but who were awaiting the hour for cross-

ing over to them, with a purpose that we wot of. How well the Rector remembered all Violet had told him about those villages and that bay then smiling before them! As they walked along they came to the sudden bend of the coast where he had caught sight of her on that memorable day when she had rejected his offer—how vividly it recalled the thrill and the heart-beating he had then experienced! A little farther—and they reached the lifeboat shed. The door was wide open—they scanned the noble boat reposing there—they noticed the rows of cork jackets hanging round the walls. There was a man seated on the floor of the shed busily engaged in putting new strings to one of these jackets which lay upon his knees. Mr. Maxforth spoke to him cheerily. The man responded as heartily, and by-and-by he got up and began to explain to them the construction of the boat and the uses of its different parts, and various other particulars. The Rector had rowed a good oar at Oxford in his college days and

enjoyed this immensely. In his turn he recounted some of his experiences on the Isis, and Mr. Holland also found something to say about some rowing he had done in his time on a small river at Davenstone. Thus the man's heart was won, and they at last parted from him on exceedingly friendly terms.

They then turned their steps homewards. The wind had changed its direction; it was now blowing hard from the east—the sea was becoming somewhat agitated. Arriving at the cottage on the green, Mr. Holland went to seek his wife, who was at that time in the kitchen regions, while the Rector proceeded to the little sitting-room, where he found Violet seated at the window, alone. He kissed her and said:

"I have been thinking a good deal to-day of the first conversation we had, love, at this very window. I have been recalling every word you said then, to the minutest syllable."

"I doubt very much," she replied with a

sweet smile, "if your memory is so exact and retentive, Clem. Let me hear."

"It was at night, you remember," he said. "I called your attention to what appeared to be tongues of flame leaping into the black sky a great distance off. You said they were the furnace-fires on the opposite shore of the bay."

"Well?"

"You told me they were ironstone works—that there was a great quantity of ironstone found in those hills, and it was a famous mining district."

"Quite true. Well?"

"You told me that the towns or villages I had discerned that day through the mist were Tambury, a watering-place; next to that Torwick; the last Eskham, where the miners chiefly lived; that they were in Yorkshire, which was divided from this county by the river that empties itself into the bay about two miles below this village."

"Your geographical knowledge is amazing" (pinching his ear). "Well?"

"You told me that in the summer and

autumn seasons, people frequently crossed the bay between Seftwick and those towns or villages ; but that at certain times it was not considered quite safe to do so. The rocks, you said, at Torwick and Eskham were dangerous, and great care and caution were needed even in calm weather."

"Go on."

"You told me of the reef opposite, that had been fatal to so many vessels ; but you said that boats crossing the bay could usually keep clear of that with ease. But there was a strong current at the mouth of the river, and—worst of all—there were the sandbanks. Boats from Torwick or Tambury or Eskham had to be very carefully steered indeed even in fair weather, for the channel was narrow, and passengers had to keep a sharp look-out for any change of wind which might drive them on to the sandbanks, where the boats would quickly be knocked to pieces by the action of the waves."

Mrs. Vaveley entering the room at this moment, followed by the minister and his

wife, no more reminiscences were indulged in, and as it was now five o'clock, tea was brought in. They did not spend much time over this refreshment, for there was much to be done yet in the house in view of the nuptials to be celebrated the next morning. Very soon all of them were busy in various ways, and the time sped by more quickly than they were aware of.

It was at half-past six in the evening that they—that is to say, three of them, thus absorbed in their several occupations —were startled by a sudden cry from Violet. She was standing at the window, looking out. They hastened to her side, and looked out also. They saw a great concourse of people standing on the cliffs, and gesticulating wildly towards the sea, while numbers more were hurrying to the shore from all quarters. Their hearts sank within them; after a few hurried words the two men rushed out quickly, followed by the trembling women.

The unexpected rising of the wind and the change in its direction had endangered

many small vessels that had been sailing in the bay. These were now making all speed to different places of shelter. Intense excitement prevailed throughout the crowd lining the beach and gathered on the sandhills, as they watched these races for life, and eager shouts hailed the small craft as they, one by one, gained the haven and were in comparative safety. It seemed likely that all would escape the fury of the sea, and that no harm to human life would happen. The vehemence of the wind had lashed the waves until they rose and fell with tremendous force, breaking into mountains of foam and spray, their roar resounding above the outcries of the men and the shrieks of the women. Still the celerity, the courage, and good seamanship displayed on board the tiny vessels driving before the storm—not forgetting the providence of God—bade fair to triumph over the violence and blind rage of the winds and waters. One after another the craft arrived in port, and it was thought that all were saved.

But, look!—a cry of horror burst from the crowd as a boat was descried labouring in the sea, evidently in the greatest peril. It was unmanageable, and in the very middle of the bay! It hoisted a signal of distress. A rush was made to the lifeboat-house.

Thither Mr. Maxforth and the minister had long since run with all haste; and by their exertions, guided by the example of the captain and crew and their friend whose acquaintance they had made that morning, the lifeboat was in readiness. Persons had been despatched to a neighbouring farmhouse, and now deafening shouts arose—loud even as the thundering of the waves upon the shore.

"Stand back! for God's sake be quick! Make way! Here they come! Heaven be praised!"

The clattering of heavy hoofs was heard, as several horses were urged forward. The next moment they were harnessed, and the lifeboat was dragged to the sea.

Violet was kneeling in the crowd behind.

The Rector stepped up to her in great agitation. She clung to him and cried in a voice of anguish:

"You are not going in the boat!"

"Yes, my darling. Two of the crew are sick; the captain has asked Philip Holland and me to go. See, I must hasten; they are calling us."

"Oh! Clement, my soul—I will spare you, for it is my duty. God will preserve you. Save them, oh! save them!"

The minister's wife had clasped her arms round her husband's neck, and was sobbing out, "Philip! Philip—come back to me and your babe! But go and rescue them—and God be with you!"

He gently disengaged himself from her embrace, and strode down to the boat with Mr. Maxforth.

The crew, with the two companions among them, all in their cork-jackets, which have been carefully tied on, are now seated—the oars are grasped—off she goes! Gallantly she cleaves the breakers. Pull, men; pull for dear life! Now she is out

on the raging sea. The gloom of night is spreading over the deep ; they cannot make out objects distinctly, but they can see a black speck right before them. It is the hapless boat struggling with the waves. Faster and faster they pull, the veins standing on their brows like whipcord. Nearer and nearer—what if, after all, they should be too late! They are now close enough to see that the boat has capsized, and that there is *one* man, apparently a fisherman, *and a boy,* clinging desperately to it, in the last stage of exhaustion. Quick, quick! they are lifted into the lifeboat—they are saved! But the fisherman moans that there are *two men* yet in the sea! They cruise about over the dark waters, searching for the missing ones, peering into the obscurity, and shouting with all their might. It is in vain. There is no answer, save the roaring of the waves and the howling of the wind. There were pieces of wreck floating about, but no human being was to be seen. They continue their search long after they know it is hopeless, and

then they slowly and half-unwillingly return.

A ringing cheer greeted the crew as they neared the shore, and when they stepped on land, the eager crowd pressed forward to congratulate them, and to gaze upon the poor human creatures snatched from the jaws of death. The fisherman and boy were conveyed to the nearest house, where hot brandy and water, dry clothes, and a roaring fire soon put life and good spirits into them again. The fisherman then told all he knew about the two men that were drowned.

"They were strangers," he said. "He could not tell their names, but they had come from the south a day or two before, and had been staying with a miner at Eskham, Shotton by name. When they—that is, the two strangers, himself, and the boy—started to cross the bay, he was uneasy, for there was a look in the sky that was threatening. But the men had told him they must be in Seftwick that night, as they had particular business. They did

not tell him what their business was. They had not gone round the coast by rail, they said, because they found there were so many changes at different stations on the line; the journey would have been tedious, and would have taken up time, which they wished to spend at their ease in Eskham, walking on the beach, and looking about them. A sail, too, on such a beautiful day as that would be delightful, they said. When they got half way across the bay, the two men became frightened and wished to return. There was a heavy sea running, and the current was strong. A minute afterwards the boat capsized, and the strangers were washed away. They sank, he supposed, for he saw them no more. Their bodies might never be recovered, but it was possible that the tide might wash them ashore. That was all he could tell them, but any further information that was wanted could be obtained from Mr. Shotton, of Eskham."

CHAPTER XVII.

IDENTIFIED!

The storm subsided at the break of day, and Violet's bridal morning arose clear, sunny, and tranquil. Accompanied by Mr. Praxton and the gentleman from Oxford—who had both arrived at the village late the previous evening—Mr. Maxforth was early at the church, looking none the worse for the exertions and excitement he had undergone in the lifeboat, and evidently in the best of spirits. The clergyman was in the vestry, waiting for them; and with him, pending the arrival of the bride, they chatted about the incidents of the previous day. The bodies of the drowned men, Mr. Deane said, had pro-

bably been carried away to sea, and would never be recovered. If they *were* found, there would be an inquest, of course. He did not remember having witnessed so sudden a tempest as that of yesterday, he said. Seftwick was an astonishing place for gales. For his part, he preferred a warmer climate. He would gladly exchange livings with a brother residing in the south of England.

Mr. Praxton protested that he looked remarkably well; so did the bridegroom; so likewise did the gentleman from Oxford.

Before Mr. Deane could make any further remark, a great commotion at the west end of the church, heralding the approach of the bride, warned them it was time to take their places.

How beautiful was Violet; how happy and proud her sister; how thoughtful and abstracted the dissenting minister! The latter—his short, thick-set figure quite in the rear of the group—was reflecting that the last time he had been within the walls of a *church* he had led Kate Vaveley to a

similar altar. How he had scandalised his people at Grange Street then! What a long train of adverse circumstances had followed! He doubted whether they had forgiven him yet. Some of them certainly had not. And yet, did they but know the Church of England as he knew her, how much they would love and reverence her! What a pity that they should wrap around themselves the mantle of ignorance and prejudice! These were the thoughts that filled the mind of Mr. Holland.

When the service was ended and the wedding guests followed the bride and bridegroom to the cottage on the green, the minister was still abstracted and moody. But he was able to shake off his depression at the breakfast-table, and all went merrily as a marriage bell. Before the departure of the wedded pair for London, Mr. Holland was enabled to extract from the bridegroom, in private, an important piece of information. It related to the anonymous bequest from which the minister derived an income of one hundred pounds a year,

in addition to his official salary. He had for some time believed that he was indebted to Mr. Hartleby for that bequest. He wished to have his mind set at rest upon the point—to know whether his belief was correct or not. He therefore seized a favourable opportunity, when he was alone with Mr. Maxforth for a few minutes before the arrival of the cab, to put the question to him; and then he learned the truth. His hitherto unknown friend and benefactor was, indeed, the late Mr. Hartleby. "A churchman again," thought the minister. How singular it was, that while the members of his own sect had been as thorns in the flesh from the time he had settled at Oxbury until now, churchmen everywhere, on the other hand, had shown him unnumbered acts of kindness, had stood by him, and sympathised with him, throughout his career. He did not know of the Rector's own liberality, be it remembered. To this day Mr. Holland has no knowledge of *that*. But he *had* learned how Mr. Maxforth had sympathised with him throughout his trials.

He *did* know how helpful and strengthening had been the Rector's friendship!

He remembered, too, how Sir John Stoneleigh—another churchman!—had, by his timely donation, relieved him of serious embarrassment, and extricated him from a very pressing danger.

We can scarcely wonder that the poor minister felt favourably disposed to the Establishment as he called all these circumstances to mind.

The breakfast-party broke up very soon after the wedded pair had gone. Mr. Deane departed to attend to his various duties in the parish; the "best man" had to catch the train for Oxford; and Mr. Praxton returned to Scamborough.

Mr. Holland was now left alone in the dining-room; for, as soon as the male guests had taken themselves off, the ladies had retired upstairs.

He was listlessly turning over the leaves of a book he had taken from a table, when the postman arrived at the cottage with a letter. It was brought to him by the

servant-maid, and he tore it open. His astonishment when he read the contents we will not attempt to describe.

"oxbury sep 29 187—

"to mister olland

"DEER PASTURE AND FREND

"i be Anxious to let you know about something which my Good wife have heern Tell of this very day something which mister copperfoks and amos flint is Doing against you which be very wrong and you ort to be told about it if so be you will excuse the liberty i take which i fear you will not Get my letter till too late to be any use to you they heern from some one about mister maxforth corting the young Lady who is sister to your wife which i have worked in his garden many A day so i know what a good kind gentleman he be but they disapproved of it and they did not like that you should keep it from the people so they made up their minds as they could not hinder them coming together to meet you At the wedding As they said you

would deny it and they meant to speak afore the people that you was not true dissent and would Get you turned out I do think they be very wrong and foolish To bring Disgrace upon us all by acting so and many more think the Same i do feel for you in this new trial i hope you will not lose heart they have left oxbury to go To a relation at eskham and will leave there for the wedding so i hope you will be Prepared for them i think it be Shameful and i hope this will reach you in time i am

" deer pasture

" your respeckful frend

" REUBEN CROCK"

The poor minister was astounded and horrified by this revelation. For several minutes it completely deprived him of the use of his faculties, and he sat in a kind of trance. This was the last and heaviest stroke of all. He remained petrified, as it were, gazing with a stony stare upon vacancy. When he recovered a little, and began to reflect, the most powerful feeling

in his mind was grief—grief on account of the meanness, the bigotry, the wickedness of the two men, of whose dreadful fate he could now entertain no manner of doubt. He summoned his wife, and with a trembling hand gave her the letter to read.

"Philip!" she cried in a thrilling voice, when she had perused it, "they must have planned this long since! And now they have miserably perished in the waters! It is unspeakably shocking!"

"I must write to the widows, I suppose," said Mr. Holland, his face very pale, and his voice hoarse, "to let them know what has happened. It is a painful thing to do, but it is my duty."

"Yes, you must do it," answered Kate, with a shudder. "And you will have to bury the men if they are found—read the service over them, I mean."

They sat talking earnestly for some time, and then at last Mrs. Holland went upstairs, while the minister, in order to collect his thoughts before writing the letters, put on his hat and started for a long medi-

tative stroll upon the beach. The tide was coming in, the day was beautifully fine, but he took no heed of any outward objects, being absorbed in melancholy reflections. It was only a very few weeks since he had officiated at the marriage of Mary Gray at Grange Street ; she was bright and happy then. Now the terrible obligation rested upon him to send her tidings of her husband's sad and sudden death. In what words could he best convey the dreadful news ? And the other widow—what language would be most judicious, and at the same time most consoling to her ? Not a syllable should escape him in either letter regarding the wicked purpose the dead men had formed to injure him, and in the attempt to execute it had lost their lives. He would be careful not to augment the anguish of the women by the slightest reference to *that*. So far as he was able, he would, in the exercise of his sacred office, console and counsel the living, but he would abstain from rebuke or condemnation of the dead.

Having arranged the order of his thoughts and the language of his proposed communications, Mr. Holland, who had by this time walked a great distance along the shore, was about to retrace his steps to the little cottage, in order to write the letters, when, lifting his eyes, he saw a great number of people at some distance before him. The crowd had apparently gathered in two circles on the edge of the advancing tide, and were bending down with earnest gestures to some object or objects lying on the sands. The minister quickened his steps to join them, his heart beating rapidly with a vague dread and curiosity.

"What is it?" he breathlessly asked of a fisherman as he pressed forward.

"Two bodies washed ashore, sir," answered the man solemnly.

The next moment Philip's eyes were fastened upon the ghastly forms stretched on the ground before him, and recognising them instantly despite the awful change in their appearance, he became completely overpowered by emotion and excitement,

his head swam, he reeled, and then fell senseless into the arms of the bystanders.

By the time he recovered the bodies had been conveyed into a public-house hard by, but several persons still lingered around the young minister, looking upon him with sympathetic and inquiring glances. He told them the names of the deceased, with such further particulars as it was expedient to divulge, giving to a policeman who came up his own address, and telling him he would telegraph to the widows, who would, no doubt, be in Seftwick in the course of the following day. Feeling very ill and weak, he then walked to the post-office and sent the messages, after which he went home to tell his wife what he had seen.

The two widows arrived in the village the next day. Philip had made arrangement for their lodging, and left his card at the door, but did not see them. He went again, but a second time he failed to gain admission. The landlady told him the two ladies wished her to say no visitors whatever could be admitted. He knew the

interview would have been as distressing to himself, had he obtained it, as to the two women; and having now discharged his duty towards them in their affliction, he did not call again.

The next morning the inquest was held. The little room of the inn was crowded in every part. Among those present was of course Mr. Holland, who was shocked, when the two women gave their evidence, by their death-like pallor and their evident anguish. The younger witness sobbed as though her heart was breaking. The minister, as he looked upon her child-like face, felt convinced she had no previous knowledge of the real purpose with which the confederates had made their long journey to Eskham. Nothing was elicited during the inquest respecting that hidden purpose, and the jury gave in their verdict of "Drowned by misadventure." Philip sought an opportunity of speaking a few words of condolence to the women in private, but failed to get near them; for they most carefully avoided him, and kept

their faces turned steadily in another direction, so that their eyes never once met his own. But about two hours afterwards, as he was seated in the cottage writing a few simple words of sympathy, which he meant to send to them previous to their departure from Seftwick, a note was brought to him directed in a female hand, which he opened with trembling eagerness. It ran as follows :

" Dear Sir,

" I fervently hope you will forgive me for having declined to see you when you called upon us, but, alas ! I am smitten down with agony, and an interview with you would kill me, though I know quite well your only motive is a desire to alleviate my misery. I heard but yesterday from my companion in misfortune *that* which has increased my pain tenfold ; but oh ! you will think of the erring ones who sinned against you, as one who knows that 'to err is human, to forgive divine !' Our poor husbands are to be buried to-morrow

at the cemetery at three o'clock. May I ask you to officiate? This is my earnest request, and my sister in calamity concurs. I believe you will of your great kindness consent to do this, and anxiously await your answer to that effect.

"I am, dear sir,

"Yours respectfully,

"MARY FLINT."

What could Mr. Holland do but at once send an answer, signifying his willingness to accede to their request, and adding those few simple words of sympathy which he had thought over beforehand?

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT STEP.

The cemetery was situated on a rising ground about two miles from Seftwick, and not far from the spot where the bodies of the two men were found. Thither, on a raw, gusty, dismal morning, their remains were conveyed, followed by a great concourse of people, who, knowing nothing of the hidden design with which the deceased had come to the neighbourhood, testified in this way their sympathy for the sorrowing relatives, and also their curiosity and excitement. The funeral service was read by Philip. Several persons had come from Oxbury to take their places as mourners. When the coffins were borne from the

chapel to the grave, Mr. Flint led the elder widow, while the ex-deacon followed with Mary Flint. Though the minister's voice faltered a good deal, he got through the service without being overcome by the emotions he nevertheless could not entirely subdue. The ceremony ended, he shook hands with the mourners, but did not trust himself to speak to them, because his own heart was full to bursting. Then he left the cemetery.

About an hour afterwards he sent a carefully-worded note to Mr. Flint, at his lodging in the village, stating that, after the occurrences of the past few days, he found himself indisposed, and indeed unable to resume his duties at Oxbury on the following Sunday, and requesting him (the deacon) on his return to Grange Street, to summon a special meeting of all the church members, to be held at the earliest date that was convenient, inasmuch as he (Mr. Holland) had certain business to bring before them of importance to that community, and which would not admit of delay.

The minister, indeed, had formed a resolution in his own mind—which he did not specify in his note—but which he intended to reveal fully and frankly to the Grange Street people when they should assemble on the occasion named—on which occasion also he meant to tell them his reasons for forming that resolution. Whatever it was he had already made his wife acquainted with its nature, and she entirely and heartily approved it.

Philip heard the next day that the widows and their friends had left the village and returned to Oxbury. He himself remained where he was for nearly a week, but on the eve of the day fixed for the special meeting (of which Mr. Flint had sent him an intimation) he also arrived at home, and kept himself secluded at the chapel-house until the hour had come for going to the meeting.

When he entered the school-room he found that a very large company had assembled. The usual preliminaries having been gone through, the minister rose and spoke as follows :

"I have called you together, my friends, in order to tell you in a few simple words about a certain important step I am going to take; and also to make you acquainted with my reasons for taking that step. I beseech you to hear me patiently.

"And I wish to state in the first place, as a matter of fact, that I hereby resign my position and office as your pastor. That is the point of greatest consequence to you. The other matter more immediately concerns me. It is this. I find I can no longer remain a member of the sect or persuasion to which I have hitherto belonged, and my connection with it must cease and determine to-night." (Sensation.)

"Now let me give you my reasons. You will remember that the invitation I received to become your minister was not a unanimous one. I have ascertained that a large number of similar invitations are not unanimous—but let that pass. After I had accepted it I found that several of you, after voting in my favour, had changed your views regarding my fitness for the

post, and requested me not to come. This was after I had preached before you as a candidate for some months. I also received a number of letters of a threatening nature from the minority. I think it a great misfortune for a community when its pastor is elected by processes of that kind, and I prefer a totally different system.

"It is needless to dwell upon the annoyances to which, when I came here, I was subjected by the trustee of your property, and others, or upon the difficulty I had in getting admission to the chapel-house. Such things, however, illustrate the fact that though *the people* are supposed to manage their own affairs, they are really in the hands of a clique, a committee, or even an individual.

"When I married, a desperate attempt was made to get rid of me, because my choice was displeasing to many of the people—indeed to nearly all of them. And why? My wife did not belong to your sect, and I was not married in one of the chapels belonging to your sect. Nearly

every voice was raised in a hue-and-cry against me, then. I was told to 'begone!' and because I stood my ground a memorial was signed and sent to me, which I at once put into the fire. Were such proceedings as those calculated to increase my respect for the power put into your hands; or to make me confident that you ought to possess such power? I tell you frankly, I would much prefer that my official interests should be in the hands of competent and educated persons—persons whose decisions are guided by principles of equity, and who are responsible for those decisions to a higher authority." (Great sensation.)

"There are many pious people among you—many for whom I entertain great respect. Noble names can also be mentioned, owned by genuine Nonconformists; yet I doubt whether dissent is a very good soil, after all, for the growth of the highest kinds of Christian life. So far as my observation and reading have gone, it does not develop the best types very freely. Now, in my poor judgment *that*

is the most admirable form of church government which produces in greatest abundance the most perfect types of life and character.

"You perceive that I am speaking freely and boldly to-night. I own it is nearly the first time I have felt entirely unfettered in your presence. No longer do I stand in dread of giving offence, and thereby bringing down an authoritative rebuke upon my head, or suffering any diminution of my income. I am thankful to say I already breathe a clearer and more expansive atmosphere, and feel that I am answerable henceforward, not to any man, or body of men, but to Him from whom I derive my authority to preach—that is God.

"Our good friend, Mr. Flint, will pardon me, I hope, when I speak one word about the diaconate. I know him to be a sincere, upright man, and a better deacon than many societies can boast. I have been more fortunate than some, too, in this respect, that there have never been more than two such officials here—at

present only one. I pity those pastors where there are six or seven—seven rulers to serve and please—many of them not possessed of half as much education, judgment, or reasonableness as Mr. Flint. But henceforth I shall have but one chief, and he a gentleman of position and culture.

"Had there been peace and quietness here, I could have lived and died among you contentedly. I will not dwell upon the unhappy past, for it could serve no good purpose if I did. But what scenes we have witnessed! What anger, strife, seditions, murmurings, and revilings! Perhaps some of you will say it was because you made a bad beginning. We did make a bad beginning, truly, as I have shown, and you and I did not get a fair start together. But bad beginnings are not so very uncommon, unfortunately; and your system is not an admirable one for healing a breach, or smoothing down differences of opinion. And I greatly fear that even where good beginnings are made, your

system affords too many facilities for contention and schism.

"I am not a great admirer of your monthly business meetings. When I remember how I was bound hand and foot by them, and how upon every trifling detail of management, long speeches had to be made beforehand by anybody who chose to make them, and how hardly two members could ever agree upon any point whatever, and amendment followed amendment in quick succession, I cannot believe you have reason to be proud of such an institution.

"It may be, my friends, that while I have been with you, you have not shown more attachment to your particular creed than dissenters elsewhere generally do. Pardon me for saying I have noticed a tendency to be obstinately and blindly wedded to your favourite opinions and practices—an unreasonable warmth and zeal on the part of some in favour of a party or a sect. A little more knowledge and wider sympathies would correct that

tendency; but I greatly fear your system fosters and strengthens the kind of prejudice to which I allude. I have found it do so to a great extent.

"The events of the last few days have been too painful to admit of more than a passing mention. A gloom has been cast upon your society, from which it will not speedily recover. I myself am well-nigh heart-broken. The lessons they teach I must leave for another preacher to impress upon your minds.

"And now I have done. I am about to enter the Church of England; and though I shall never think unkindly of your sect, but shall cheerfully recognise God's work through whomsoever it may be accomplished; yet I should unfeignedly rejoice if you, and all dissenters, were likewise to be gathered within her fold."

THE END.

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